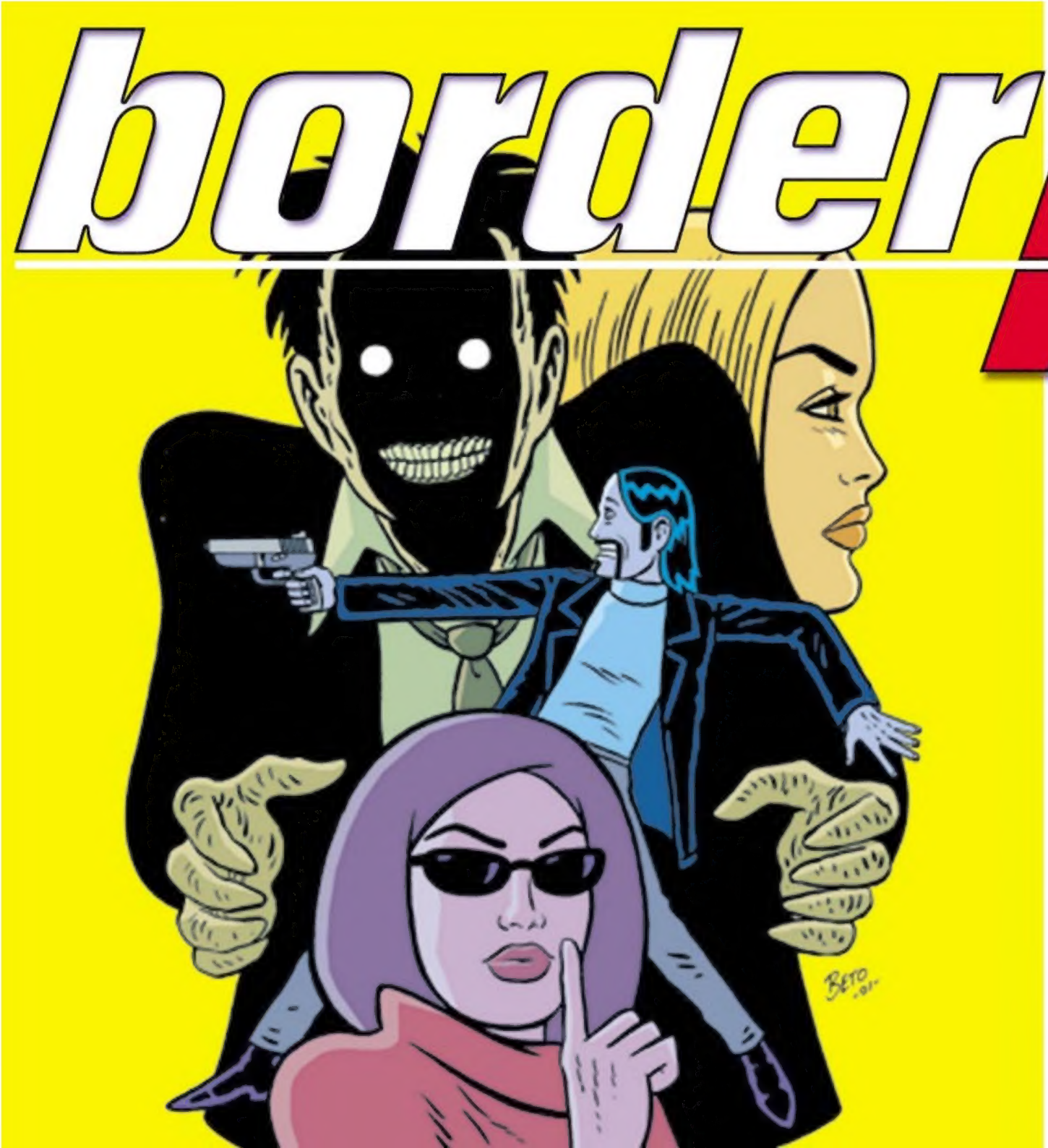
borderline

THE Comics Magazine

Sept #2



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Colleen Doran & Charlie Adlard

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Bries, Raymond Briggs, Simon Fraser, Marc Alessi, Grip, Jim Russell, World Comics & Jodorowsky

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Small Press

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BORDERLINE
THE COMICS MAGAZINE

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LINE OF FIRE

Phil Hall wasn't going to write an editorial this month, but...

THERE'S nothing more daunting than knowing you have a deadline to face and you haven't got anything to talk about. That's why I decided to make *Line of Fire* an irregular editorial – you know, talk to you when I've got something to talk about.

There probably wasn't a person over the age of 30 who heard the news of John Buscema's serious illness and didn't feel a pang of nostalgia and sadness. For me personally, John Buscema is one of my all-time favourites – a key artist in the comics of my most formative years; the yardstick by which others were judged.

I talked to my team and said that I wanted to do something, but I didn't want to be seen as a graverobber or a ghoul. I had a wish to celebrate John's life and make him aware, when time is being harsh, that he *is* one of the all-time greats of comicbooks.

Then the announcement from John's family that things weren't as bad as first feared came to light and everyone breathed a sigh of relief - we weren't, it seems, about to lose yet another founding father.

But, the burning desire to celebrate John's career hasn't dimmed. Too often it is left to those that remain to eulogise and beatify lost loved ones and, if we may be brutal about this, what bloody good is that to the poor person who is no longer with us?

I come from a family with a long line of heart disease and breathing disorders - I smoke like a chimney, I know it's going to kill me, and I'll tell you what; I'd rather know how much I'll be missed and how much I was appreciated before I go, than rely on a belief in the afterlife, where I'm floating over my coffin while a priest who I don't know doesn't quite sum up my life the way my friends and colleagues could.

But, how do you go about such a project without people thinking we're just a bunch of vampires?

John Buscema has been in the business over 50 years, he's rightly or wrongly called a veteran. John Byrne has been in the business since the 1970s, he is also called a veteran (in fact, I recently read that Kurt Busiek was also a veteran; I wonder how he feels about that?). The truth is, any creator with 30 years plus under his or her belt is owed a huge debt by this industry.

So **Borderline** intends to dedicate a number of pages, probably in every other issue, to tributes to the greats of the industry. I'm going to get in contact with today's stars as well as yesterday's heroes, and ask them what they think about specific creative icons from our pasts – ones who will get the chance to see how greatly appreciated they are.

So, if you get an e-mail from me asking you what your thoughts are about Colan, Uderzo, Perez, Wrightson, Moebius, Eisner, Infantino, Sleen, Adams, Lee or the brothers Buscema, don't be alarmed, we're not burying them before they die - this is a celebration of our history, not a commemoration! These won't be living eulogies. Nor will they be "imminent death announcements" - after all, in comics nobody dies forever!

A recommendation from the editor:

To the right is the cover of DC's ***Just Imagine Stan Lee and John Buscema's Superman*** *– for many of us, however hackneyed Stan's writing might nowadays seem, it will be a treat to see John Buscema drawing a character he seemed perfectly suited to draw. However, this isn't the Big Blue we're all used to, which is a shame.*

All you "young" fans, who didn't grow up with Buscema's ***Avengers***, ***Fantastic Four***, ***Silver Surfer***, *or* ***Conan***, *probably won't appreciate just how innovative the guy was and still is. The problem is, outside of John's* ***Conans*** *and The Essential* ***Silver Surfer*** *reprint, his other work is now likely to set you back a lot of money, so this will be a relatively cheap introduction to it.*

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EVOLUTION OF A MUTANT

New animated TV series takes the X-Men back to their roots... confused? You might be!

THE hit cartoon show *X-Men: Evolution* will return to its roots when Marvel releases the comic-book version of the series in November.

As the show kicks off its second season, the new all-ages title based on the popular programme begins with a story that reveals events which took place before the very first episode.

Writer Devin Grayson, together with artists Udon Studios will take readers to a time before the X-Men and the Xavier Institute, when two men with very different visions became friends, when a young woman discovered her most dangerous weapon was her mind, and when a frightened amnesiac went in search of the truth.

Now, the lives of Professor X, Magneto, Storm, and Wolverine collide as the world stands on the brink of genetic war.

"How do two best friends become arch-enemies?" the comic asks. "How does a goddess from Africa find her place in the world? How does a man without a past decide mankind's future? All heroes start with power and ambition they must learn to control. All villains start with ideas they believe to be just. And all great legends begin with 'once upon a time...'

"**X-Men: Evolution** - In the beginning, there was X!"

The debut issue of this ongoing, monthly series appears in shops this November, priced $2.25

Teleporting German gets miniseries treatment

NIGHTCRAWLER, the swashbuckling German X-Man, teleports into his own *X-Men Icons* mini-series in November.

The new series will take Kurt Wagner away from the distant lands, deadly adversaries and galaxies far, far away which he is used to facing, and force him to confront evils closer to home which he has never faced - but which will test his courage and faith like never before.

A Marvel spokesman said: "As with *Cyclops* and *Rogue*, **Nightcrawler** is being produced both for the veteran and casual reader in mind. "This is the definitive Nightcrawler: who is he? why he is a hero? and what does he believe in?" The series marks the comic book debut of playwright Chris Kipiniak. Art is by Matt Smith and the first issue cover is by Massimiliano Frezzatto.

This monthly, four-part mini-series debuts in November, price $2.50.

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DC gets a Grip

GILBERT Hernandez will cross the gulf between independent comics and the mainstream with **Grip: The Strange World of Men**, a five-issue mini series from Vertigo.

The critically acclaimed co-creator of **Love and Rockets** (with brothers Mario and Jaime) will both write and draw **Grip**.

The story begins when Mike Chang wakes up in the middle of a busy street, with no idea of where – or who – he is.

But these are the least of his problems. He's being chased by a group of heavily armed thugs known as the Overboys. Spewing out inane phrases and shaking uncontrollably, he runs for his life.

In his quest for answers, Mike encounters a detective (and his grandmother), a strange dwarf couple, the silent Mystery Girls, and a smooth-talking know-it-all who may be Mike's partner in crime – if only he could be trusted.

Although he doesn't recognize his own reflection, this is not a simple case of amnesia. Mike Chang's worst nightmares about gender, identity and conspiracy theories have collided – and who he was is far less frightening than what he is about to become.

Then there is Mike's skin. It doesn't just seem to have a life of its own – it really does... and it's about to go exploring.

Editor Shelly Bond said: "In the spirit of film-makers David Lynch and Pedro Almodovar, Gilbert's colourful cast and irreverent sensibilities fuel a story that defies all genres and stereotypes of contemporary fiction.

"At once a horrific sci-fi thriller and a mysterious romantic adventure, **Grip** is a unique and quirky story about the world at large and coming to grips with the skin you're in."

Grip: The Strange World of Men is a 5-issue Vertigo mini-series edited by Shelly Bond, suggested for mature readers. Issue #1 arrives in comic-book stores on November 14th with a cover price of $2.50 US.

An interesting sidebar: Hernandez was one of **Time Magazine**'s "Hot Pick for comics creator of 2001" (along with brother Jaime) for his work on the brothers' **Love and Rockets**.

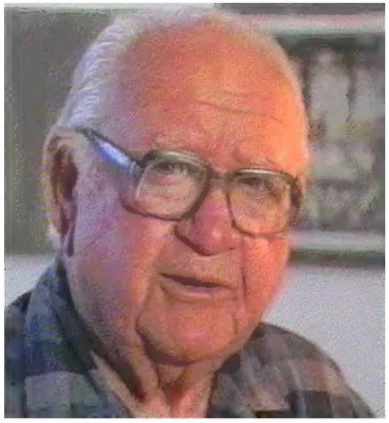
Witchblade to fight again

TNT have confirmed a second season of the TV show based on Top Cow's **Witchblade**, after a successful run for the two-hour pilot and for the 11 episodes of the first year. Produced by Top Cow Productions and Halsted Pictures, in association with Warner Brothers Television, the series was watched by over 35 million viewers, leading Robert DeBitetto (TNT's president of original programming) to comment, "TNT's commitment to the Witchblade series is prompted by the strong performance of the two-hour pilot and our initial series run. We are thrilled to be able to offer viewers additional hours of a drama franchise they clearly enjoy, while continuing our successful partnership with sister company Warner Brothers Television."

Witchblade is the story of a New York detective, Sara Pezzini, who battles Earth's darkest forces with the aid of an ancient living weapon which has a mind of its own.

IN FOCUS...

CREATOR OF AUSTRALIA'S FAVOURITE CARTOON STRIPS DIES



One of Australia's most popular and most durable cartoonists has died, aged 92.

Mention **The Potts** and several generations of Australians will recognise he artist and writer of Australia's longest-running comic strip – a gentle, humorous look at an average family. Jim Russell was inseparably linked with the strip in the public's mind – a feat all the more remarkable given that he was not associated with the feature for its first 20 years.

Russell replaced creator Stan Cross on **The Potts** (originally titled *You and Me*, then *Mr and Mrs Pott*) in 1940. When it moved from the irreverent magazine *Smith's Weekly* to mainstream newspapers circa 1950 he quietened the lead characters' antics somewhat; wife Maggie became less of a harridan, husband John was less likely to stagger home after a jolly evening and two young grandchildren were introduced. Russell compensated for this domestication, however, by introducing a figure who came to dominate the strip – Uncle Dick. Richard Pennyquick was a classic lovable rogue; a lazy, sponging, fortune-hunting, tall story-telling, cigar-smoking and heavy-drinking larger than life character who became the feature's most popular character.

Though the strip occasionally mirrored current events – the Potts attended every Olympics from 1956 to 1972 for example – under Russell it gradually came to exist in a timeless world where men wore hats, offices had pretty female secretaries and cheeky office boys and the family would happily troop off to watch the "big local football match". But that was part of the charm of the strip to long-time readers – as was the occasional recurrence of old jokes! Such occasional repetition was more than forgivable in over 60 years of continuous work.

A legend in Australian comics, Jim also worked as an editorial cartoonist and in Australia's 1940s comic book industry. During World War Two he produced such anti-Axis strips as *Adolf, Hermann and Musso*; one story – perhaps apocryphal - claimed that these landed him on a Nazi blacklist. The strip was syndicated for a time in the USA and in 1966, Russell became the first Australian to be elected to the US National Cartoonists Society. He eventually became patron of the Black and White Artists Club, the Australian cartoonists' society.

Jim had a wide range of interests outside comics. He was a highly regarded pioneer in Australia's travel agents' industry, working in that field until his 90s, and a prominent sports administrator and commentator.

He was active until the end, continuing to produce both the daily and Sunday **Potts** strips. The day he died Jim had, with regrets, withdrawn from judging a cartooning competition at a suburban primary school.

Mark Cannon, Canberra, Australia
Mark.Cannon@dcita.gov.au

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IN FOCUS...

More Soldier, less Boy Scout: Captain America becomes the next Marvel Knight

MARVEL Comics' publicity describes it thus: The Knights have just gained a Soldier. Powered by the new creative team of writer John Ney Rieber (**Books of Magic**) and penciler John Cassaday (**Planetary**), the shield slinger's series is to be relaunched in early 2002 – as part of the Marvel Knights imprint.

John Ney Rieber had this to say about the new direction taken for the Knights Cap:

"The man's a soldier: fierce, focused, and absolutely dedicated to the American dream. He fights for the people - we, the people - because he's one of us. He knows this country. He sees America as it is – the beauty and the bloody shadows of it, the nobility and the savagery of it. He knows what it could be - what it should be. What it was meant to be, from the beginning... and he'd die to get us there.

"And though he's just a man, like the ideal of freedom that drives him he's really hard to kill."

John Cassaday added: "I can't say this will be a revolution or an unrecognizable Captain America. However, what John Ney Rieber and I are putting together will deliver a Captain America that has more on his mind than beating the super-villain-of-the-week senseless.

"Our Cap believes in the American standard, but you won't catch him delivering syrupy speeches. Our man's patriotic testosterone comes out of his angry fists, not endless rhetoric. He fights for the American dream, fearing he'll never have the chance to experience it himself.

"Revolution? Maybe not. But it is The New Deal."

Series editor Stuart Moore said: "Captain America is probably the most perfect character Marvel has: strong, idealistic, and smart as hell. What we want to do is toughen up the world around him, and give him some challenges that really test who and what he is.

"As readers of **Planetary** know, John Cassaday is one of the finest artists in the business today. And when I was looking for a writer, John Ney Rieber sent me the best Cap scene I'd ever read. Together they've produced a Marvel Knights relaunch that'll make everyone sit up and take notice. America: love it or leave it - you'll be reading it."

Visually, Cassaday said there would be a tweaking of Cap's familiar look. He described the new direction for **Borderline**: "More soldier, less boy scout. He's tough. He's sometimes mean. He fights for the ideals of freedom and what is right, but he's no fossil. He lives in today's world and has adapted well.

"Visually, he's going to have a slightly more militaristic look. His mask will appear more like a helmet, his chain mail will look more like gladiator armor. You'll notice subtleties such as seams in the clothing. I think the blues will look darker, more like the blue of the flag. His reds will be blood-red, very striking. I want it to appear less like a costume and more like a uniform.

"A uniform created by a mad genius tailor in 1941."

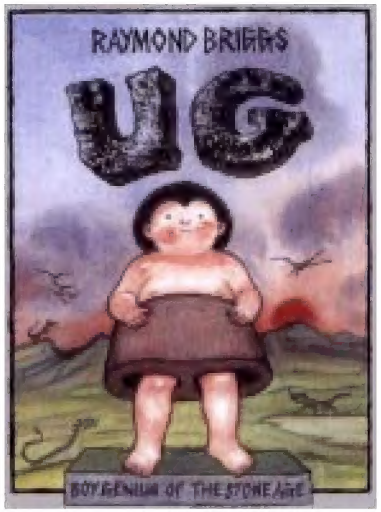
How is he going to juggle this book with his other title, **Planetary**?

"It's almost a non-issue. **Planetary** is a very slow process and I have a great deal of time in my schedule to play elsewhere. **Planetary** remains as important to me as ever. I'll bounce back and forth from Cap to **Planetary** until **Planetary** ends, which comes around #25."

Other projects on the slate for Cassaday are **Planetary/The Batman: Night On Earth** and **Just Imagine Stan Lee Creating Crisis**. He describes both as "fairly far from being released".

Captain America #1, which will maintain the title's original run with Marvel's dual numbering system, leaps into comic book stores in March 2002.

UG – It's Raymond Briggs



BRITISH cartoonist Raymond Briggs' new book **UG: Boy Genius of the Stone Age** is released on September 6th in the UK with US publication following in 2002. As the creator of such classics as **The Snowman**, **Fungus the Bogeyman** and his most recent book **Ethel and Ernest**, Briggs has established himself as one of the most loved and respected cartoonists in the world, appealing to adults and children alike.

UG tells the story of a cave boy who refuses to accept the limitations of his world. Being an inquisitive and intelligent child, Ug suggests a series of modifications to improve the quality of life. His ideas about heating, cooking and balls that actually bounce are met with a hostile reaction by his parents. Told with humour and pathos, Ug's quest for soft trousers once again proves Briggs to be a master of his craft.

Ethel and Ernest, Briggs' account of his parents' life, sold over 100,000 copies in the UK and has been cited as one of the best graphic novels of all time. Despite this success he laments the condescending treatment given to serious graphic books in his home country. He admires the European attitude towards comics and was reportedly blown away by Chris Ware's **Jimmy Corrigan** book, recently issued by his publisher.

Ug: Boy Genius of the Stone Age is published by Jonathan Cape, priced £10.99. ISBN 0224047396

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Experiments in the DM

DC Comics is about to embark on an experiment to discover if the direct market - that's your local comic shop - is meeting its potential.

The company is working with nearly a dozen volunteer retailers on a market saturation test which will run for three consecutive months, starting later this year. The aim is to quantify where retailers are ordering too few comics.

In the direct market, store owners buy comics from distributors. If a store over-orders a comic, the proprietor is left with extra copies and a hole in his or her wallet.

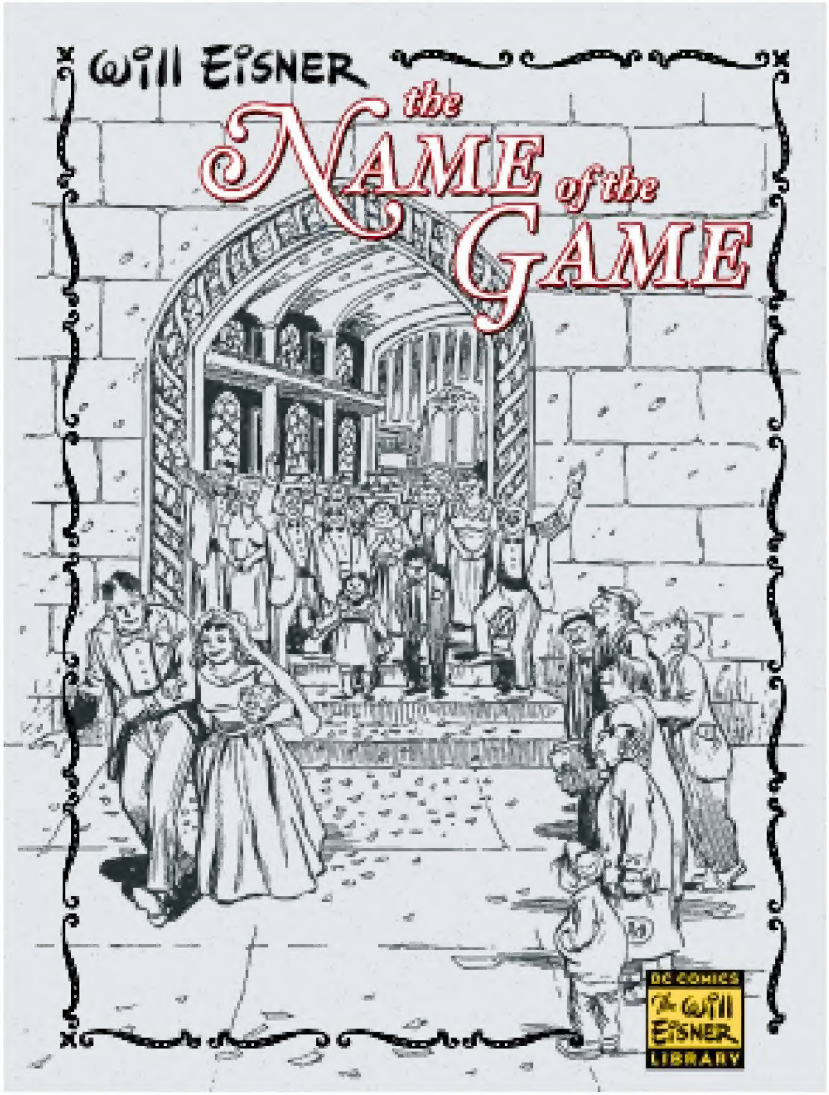
It is less easy to work out when a store has under-ordered - or at least the quantity by which a store under-orders. If a comic sells out, then the store manager can pat himself on the back and pocket the change - but how many sales is he missing on that title?

The DC experiment aims to work out the answer to that question. The process begins when retailers submit their orders as normal through Diamond. DC will override those orders to provide extra quantities of many, if not all, DC Comics titles for that month. The saturation test will involve periodicals only, not collected editions or DC Direct Products.

The goal is to find out if there is a quantifiable shortfall of sales. If DC discovers that the volunteer stores can sell an average of 20 per cent more copies of a title, then the company can use that number to help retailers see what sales they are missing.

The test was developed by DC's Bob Wayne, working with Brian Hibbs of Comix Experience, and will involve retailers from a variety of locations and operation sizes.

Wayne, together with DC's direct sales team, hopes to put this information to good use in planning future sales and marketing efforts.



*FOLLOWING the success of last year's **Minor Miracles** (the first original addition to DC's Will Eisner Library), one of comics' most influential and groundbreaking storytellers returns with an all-new 176-page hardcover, **The Name of the Game**.*

Written and illustrated by Will Eisner, the graphic novel is a generational saga of a wealthy Jewish family's assimilation into New York society, spanning the first half of the 1900s. It's also the story of the American Dream, and the game of marrying for social advantage. With this book the author relates in modern form the classic fairy tale story of the pauper's hope of advancement by marrying into royalty.

***The Name of the Game** arrives in comicbook stores on November 21st, with a cover price of $29.95 U.S.*

Indy classic switches to color and sells out!

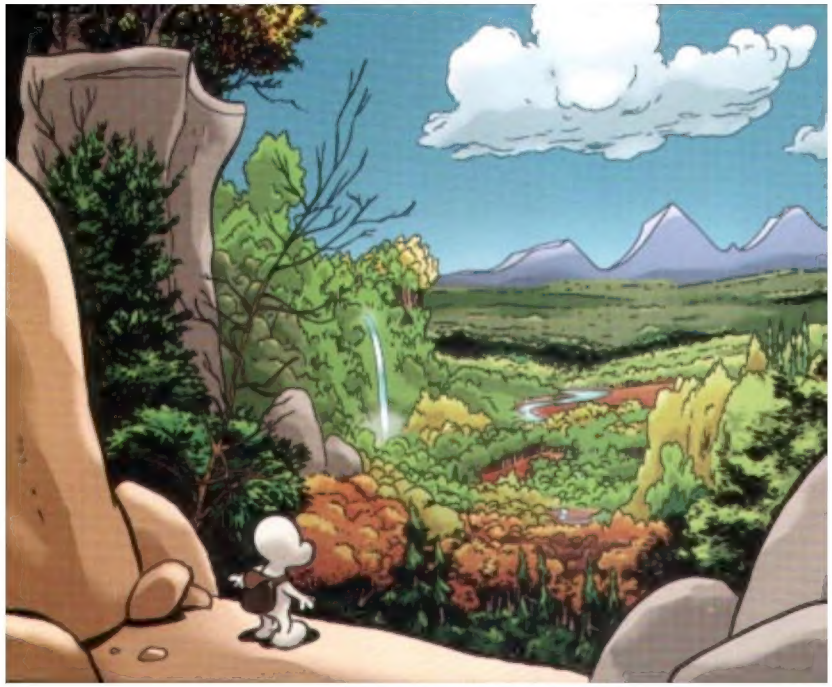
BLACK and white indy favourite **Bone**, by Jeff Smith, switched to colour for a 10th anniversary reprint of its first issue - and sold out before it even hit the shelves.

The Bone 10th Anniversary Edition was released by Smith's company Cartoon Books to mark a solid decade of successful publishing. It will never be reprinted.

Kathleen Glosan, speaking for Cartoon Books, said the sell-out was "largely due to the incredible number of upwardly-adjusted orders from dealers that flooded Cartoon Books while the book was still at the printers, but which arrived after the point at which Cartoon Books could have increased its already considerable print run, effectively depleting the entire print run, along with Cartoon Books' own 20 per cent overprint order, well before it was shipped to distributors."

In addition to an exquisitely coloured reprinting of the strip from the first issue of **Bone**, the 10th anniversary special edition also features:

- A profusely-illustrated eight page appreciation of **Bone** by noted comics historian R.C. Harvey;
- A fully painted Fone Bone PVC figure;
- An authentic, full color Phoney Bone gazillion dollar bill, to add a personal touch of whimsy.



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Pulp Novel Traditions

Frightening Curves offers new ideas in comics innovation

IN September, Cyberosia Publishing is going to release Antony Johnston and Aman Chaudhary's **Frightening Curves**. Containing over 40 pages of illustration from Chaudhary, **Frightening Curves** is a return to the tradition of the classic Pulp novel.

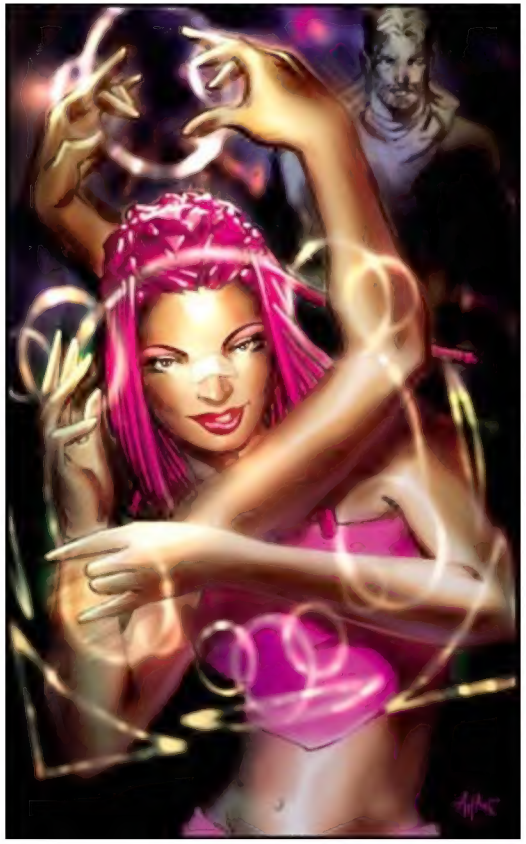
Johnston reveals what the book is all about: "gun-fighting action, scummy London streets, East End gangsters, and as a twist we've thrown in a healthy dose of surrealist magic... The story is a puzzle, reflecting [the hero] Phil's confusion over what is real and what isn't. As Phil pieces the clues together toward a greater understanding of his reality, so does the reader."

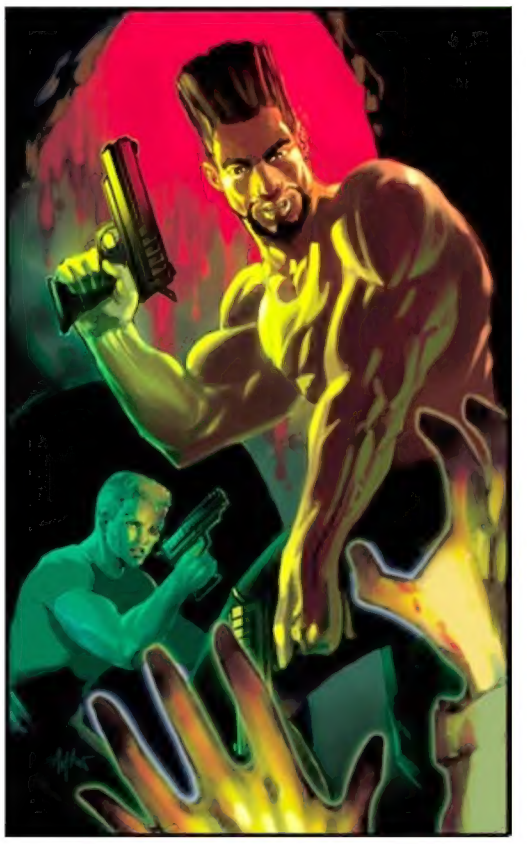
Continuing, Johnston recommended **Frightening Curves** to: "anyone who enjoyed the over-exuberant urban energy of *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, or reads Derek Raymond's 'Factory' series of novels. But it's also pretty damn surreal in places, and as a big reader of his myself, I'd hope fans of Jeff Noon would also enjoy it. On the comics front, the obvious comparison is **Hellblazer,** but - again - fans of something as surreal as **The Invisibles** should also get a kick out of the multiple layers of reality in FC."

More details about **Frightening Curves**, including the official press release, downloadable flyers and copies of the cover, and a link to a preview of the first chapter are all at the **Frightening Curves** website at *www.frighteningcurves.com*

Frightening Curves is on schedule to be shipped from Diamond to the direct market in late August/early September. Cyberosia also plans to make **Frightening Curves** available via online mail-order bookshops and also from bookstores.

Below: Aman Chaudhary's paintings from the novel are now available as prints from the ***Frightening Curves*** *website.* BL





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By any other name

THE original Avengers – the Hulk, Thor, Iron Man, Giant Man and the Wasp, plus Captain America – are to return soon as part of Marvel's Ultimate line – but under a different name.

Superstar writer and artist Mark Millar and Bryan Hitch are the creative team behind **The Ultimates**, set to debut in December.

Why the name change? It seems Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada is nervous of spin-off Avengers titles being less than successful. The company is having better luck with the Ultimate line, so the team has been named after it.

Like the Ultimate revamps of **Spider-Man** and the **X-Men**, **The Ultimates** will be a new take on the team, starting from the ground upwards. Marvel publicity states that the team will take on political and social challenges pulled from the front pages of real-world newspapers.

Mark Millar has gone on record as saying this is a reaction against galaxy-spanning, super-villain-of-the-week stories which, he says, made comics "virtually impenetrable" to the outside world. He says stories need to relate to things people can understand. The team members will be younger versions of their Marvel Universe counterparts – with differences. The Ultimate Hulk has already appeared in **Ultimate Marvel Team-Up** with Spider-Man. Quesada says he will look "more like a skinhead than Frankenstein's monster" and besides getting angry, he will get "hungry, happy and horny" – and he will overreact to each emotion.

The Ultimate Hulk will also throw away the purple pants he has worn proudly for the last 40 years. Quesada said that, at times, he will run around naked – but this will be done tastefully as the comic is aimed at a younger audience. Just as controversial is the idea that the new Hulk can go out, get drunk, and get a 'Hulk Smash' tattoo. Surely needles shatter on contact with his skin?

Iron Man is described as more of a selfish billionaire playboy than a hero.

Thor is the leader of a Greenpeace-type organisation and, rather than being the Norse god of thunder, is the god of all living things on Earth – a change which may cause friction with certain real-world believers.

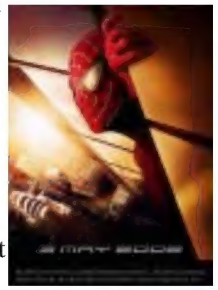
Characterisation of Captain America will focus on how strange he feels, coming from the 1940s and emerging in the 21st century.

Regarding the direction of the book, Hitch has said he and Millar want people to feel "awestruck" by what is taking place, with characters placed in situations human beings are not equipped to deal with. Little is known about the Ultimate versions of Giant-Man and the Wasp. It seems that Nick Fury will be the catalyst for many of the Ultimates' early adventures, manipulating the team into taking on missions.

Spider death fine imposed

THE California Division of Occupational Safety and Health report that Columbia Pictures, currently making *Spider-Man*, have been fined a total of $58,805 for violations relating to the death of a production worker.

Tim Holcombe, 45, was welding sets when an improperly modified forklift being used as a crane toppled over onto him. Columbia Pictures declined to comment.



There are growing calls in Hollywood for more stringent safety measures in the wake of similar deaths on other high budget films.

Just monkeying about

CARTOON pop band Gorillaz made their first UK music festival appearance at Creamfields on Saturday 25th August, headlining at the Old Liverpool Airfield. Pre-festival press from the band consisted of a list of demands such as two models dressed in Michelle Pfeiffer's Catwoman outfit; 2-D's desire for a box of Bueno chocolate bars and bottles of Yop yoghurt drink; Russel's buffet of burgers and two box-fresh import trainers; and Murdoc's insistence that the dressing room be covered with cat litter, so he can scratch around and mark his territory, and also an ample supply of asparagus wrapped in beef.

While Gorillaz wait to find out if they have won the Mercury Music Prize, (even though they asked to be removed from the shortlist), they have already won the video award at the Rushes Soho Short Film Festival for the video to their hit single, *Clint Eastwood*, beating the likes of Robbie Williams, Radiohead, Fatboy Slim and Blur, whose lead singer Damon Albarn also fronts Gorillaz.

Barkerverse flop comes back as TV series

CLIVE Barker's short-lived Razorline imprint, published by Marvel in the early 90s, is undergoing something of a comeback, with the news that **Ectokid** has been optioned for film and television by Nickelodeon, under producer Don Murphy. **Ectokid**, which only lasted 9 issues and a special, was written by James (**Starman**) Robinson, Dan (**Legion Lost**) Abnett and Larry (*The Matrix*) Warchowski from an idea by Barker. The fourteen year old title character, Dex Mungo, was the product of a human mother and a ghostly father who, at the onset of puberty, became able to see the world of the living through his right eye and the world of the dead with his left; the Here and the Hereafter.

A swashbuckling adventure serial, **Ectokid** encounters spirits as disparate as Cyrano De Bergerac, Edgar Allan Poe and Janis Joplin along the way. It is not known at this stage how closely any project will resemble the original incarnation.

Ectokid follows on the heels of SciFi's announced intention to produce a two hour movie based upon another of Barker's Razorline concepts, **Saint Sinner**, written by Doris Egan, one of the writers on James Cameron's *Dark Angel* tv series.

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Kochalka falls victim to work for hire contract

JAMES Kochalka, critically-acclaimed creator of **The Sketchbook Diaries**, **Tiny Bubbles**, **Monkey vs Robot** and **Peanutbutter & Jeremy**, found himself the victim of a change in law, courtesy of the **Burlington Free Press**, the weekly local newspaper which had been running his **Magic Boy** comic strip for the past five years. They claimed that he had to sign a work-for-hire contract in order for them to "get around a loophole in copyright law" which was preventing them from exploiting his strip on the web.

Magic Boy is a series of strips taken from Kochalka's diary, and the first compilation was published in the Spring by Top Shelf under the title **The Sketchbook Diaries**. Kochalka understandably refused to sign, as none of the other cartoonists on the paper had been asked to sign such contracts, and if he did so, he would be assigning authorial rights over the strip to the newspaper. The paper countered that the other cartoonists did not need to sign the contract, as their work was syndicated, and refused to acknowledge that Kochalka could self-syndicate, even though there are many other examples of self-syndicated newspaper strip artists, such as Matt Groening, Tony Millionaire and Tom Tomorrow. In Kochalka's words, "I refused to sign the ridiculously unfair work for hire contract, and they dumped my strip. I don't make much money, so this is actually a pretty significant financial blow to me." A campaign of emailing began when Kochalka urged his readers to write in his support to the newspaper, and although he does not expect to get his job back, he wanted to draw attention to the "retarded policy" and raise awareness among cartoonists "that might not know the ins and outs of the contract lingo as well as I do."

The situation relates to the recent Tasini verdict in the US Supreme Court concerning freelancers' rights to their own material. The ruling was that freelancers' rights were violated when newspapers permitted their articles to be included in computer databases such as LEXIS/NEXIS and others.

Subsequently, a lot of newspapers have drafted new contracts which grant them more than the first serial rights to which they would otherwise be entitled, enabling them to archive the freelancers' work in the same way they could with staff writers.

Komics 2001

KOMIKS 2001, the 12th International Festival of Comics, will be held in Lodz, Central Poland on 5th – 7th October 2001.

The festival, first organised in 1991, is one of the best known cultural events in Poland and Eastern Europe. Every year, thousands of comic fans come to Lodz to meet the creators and talk about their hobby. This year will see panels and lectures from historian Jerry Szylak and **Thorgal** translator Wojciech Birek.

Among numerous events at the festival is a competition for the best comics judged from over a hundred artists from Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic and Great Britain. The main aim of the organising committee is to promote young and talented artists by showing their work to the public and publishers, by way of a competition followed by an exhibition which runs in Lodz until November then goes on to tour to other Polish cities.

Guests from far and wide are promised, including Grzegorz Rosinski, the Swiss author of **Thorgal**. Previous guests include Polch, Christa and Baranowski. Komiks 2001 hopes to reflect today's popular artists, and also has exhibitions that delineate the history and theory of comics. The venue, Lodzki Dom Kultury, will offer a wide range of dealer tables, and as in previous years, the second day will be devoted to Manga.

For more details e-mail: festiwal@ldk.lodz.pl, go to www.mikropolis.com.pl and www.ldk.lodz.pl or telephone (042) 633-98-00 ext. 244 or 247.

Nic Cage – Hero 4 Hire

NICOLAS Cage continues to be associated with almost every comicbook movie project going. No sooner does he pull out of one than another comes along. Off the books is the mooted *Ghost Rider* film, when director Stephen Norrington committed to work on Jennifer Lopez's next film *Tick Tock* instead. Cage said, "I don't know what's going to happen with *Ghost Rider* right now. We were going to go and I don't know what happened. So now I'm not doing it."

Along comes Warner Brothers, who had spent the last year negotiating with Frank Miller and Geof Darrow to adapt their 1992 creator-owned Dark Horse series **Hard Boiled**, about a robot who thinks he's a tax collector. The project has David (*Fight Club*) Fincher attached to direct, and Nicolas Cage to star.

Harry goes to Dundee

POTTERMANIA has reached **The Beano**, with the announcement of a special edition to coincide with the UK cinema release of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* in November.

"The story will be based on *Dennis the Menace* and *The Bash Street Kids*," **Beano** editor Euan Kerr told the **Daily Record**, "They go and see the film and, inspired by it, have their own Quidditch match and get up to the usual mischief."

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INDUSTRY STANDARD

Phil Hall's look at the people and the publishers shaking up the comics industry

INNOVATION – no, not the defunct comics publisher from the Nineties, but what is needed to continue the rebirth of comicbooks.

Yes! It's official - comics are having a resurgence and proving that old adage "whatever goes around comes around". The last time comics were really hip was during the late Eighties, when yuppies would have graphic novels strewn across their $4000 jewel-encrusted coffee tables!

But, if all is good and great again, how come sales still suck ditchwater? We'll get back to that, let's bask in some glory for a second.

Say it loudly – comicbook film adaptations can work! Look at how well received *X-Men* was, or the rave reviews *Ghost World* has garnered.

Comics are in the mainstream press again. Manga is being treated as an actual subculture at last and comics creators are being accepted in the real world of entertainment as people with something to offer. Could the UK and America finally be catching up with the rest of the world?

The thing is, while *X-Men* has made inroads, it is probably *Ghost World* which has done more for comics as a serious medium. Indy comics, "slice of life" and spandex-less books are always going to have cyclical periods of popularity. It's the superhero comics that need a serious jolt of sales to add to their newly-found street cred.

And that's the problem facing the US superhero comics publishers. The current resurgence of popularity can't disguise the fact that sales are still struggling and the hardcore base of comic fans is slowly dwindling - maybe not as fast as it once was, but we're still using a Band-Aid to cover a massive bullet wound. For all of Jemas and Quesada's spin doctoring at Marvel, all they're doing is robbing Peter to pay Paul. Fair enough, they are attracting some new readers to the medium, but these guys' specific job was to make Marvel Comics a viable company again and the sales of the comics didn't need to rise that much to make Wall Street sit up and take notice. So, now Marvel is seemingly out of the mire, what next?

Well, it isn't just Marvel's long-term survival that's at stake here, it's the entire industry's.

For those of you with long enough memories, how many can remember why comics were so trendy in the late Eighties? It was because the content was innovative and adaptive. Things like **Watchmen** and **Dark Knight Returns** were universally accepted because they were contemporary pieces of fiction appearing at a time when the world's hunger for literary innovation was great. The same reasons apply to why comics are suddenly hip again in 2001. What we've got to do now is harness that positivism and do something more with it than we did in the early Nineties.

We don't need reminding how the major companies exploited the rise in comics' popularity - too many of us have piles of excrement keeping our lofts insulated - so this has to be the path they should be discouraged from following again.

Therefore, if Reiber and Cassaday's **Captain America** is a hit, let's hope Marvel will have the common sense not to try and spin off that success by launching another **Sentinel of Liberty.**

Pete Milligan and Mike Allred's **X-Force** is probably a success because it is different, but if Marvel went back to flat four colour printing and a Sixties retro style on all their X-books, you can bet that the punters would be leaving like lemmings from a Norwegian cliff.

You see, comics' publishers are still trying to get that collector mentality going – buy one, buy them all! They really need to lose that way of thinking.

Back in the early Nineties, it was a prerequisite of comics buying - collectors needed to have all the versions, all the trading cards, all the cover variants, all the crossovers and guest appearances - but in 2001 a lot of collectors are far more canny and discerning.

With the success of **JLA**, DC realised that it isn't just the characters that sell their comics, it's the creators as well. We all know that **X-Men** will sell a lot, but to get a real spike in those sales you stick l'artistes du jour on it. Keep them there for as long as possible and where possible replace them with others equally as fashionable. And, you see, this is innovative and remarkably honest – it's not the character and it's not the creator, it's the fusion of the two that makes the success!

So, the **JLA** isn't likely to need a huge revamp in the foreseeable future, because DC has committed to the main title maintaining a standard that doesn't have to be reached in the spinoffs. It is something that has become a common practice at all publishers and it does guarantee income for a limited period, depending on how good the product is. But it isn't going to make the rest of the world want to embrace comics.

We need some of that spin to be applied to marketing and promotion and we need some of that innovation to be applied in other areas. If comics are seen to be flirting with new technologies and different ways of being part of our culture, then they are going to be embraced more readily. Things like Internet comics, direct distribution, and even something like Borderline - a comic you can either read on screen, or print out - these have to be explored and possibly even exploited if the medium we follow is going to survive past this century. **BL**

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*Phil Hall has been involved in the comics industry since 1976. He introduced comics bags to the UK in 1977 and took over as editor of the respected fanzine **Media** in 1978. After a break of nearly a decade, he returned to comics in 1989 with Squonk!, his comic store. He also returned to comics magazines and created Movers and Shakers for the fledgling **Comics International**, and moved on to become News and then Features editor for the UK's leading comics magazine. He has also worked for DC, Marvel UK, and contributed to a number of comics magazines including **Overstreet**, **Tripwire** and **Comic World**, some now defunct. He also runs a successful multimedia company.*

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Eddie Campbell's mainstream adventure

EDDIE Campbell's name will possibly be at its most prominent when the movie adaptation of his and Alan Moore's epic graphic novel **From Hell** hits the cinemas. After a short dispute with the film company over the omission of Moore and Campbell's names from the advertisement, credit being attributed to Kitchen Sink Press instead, fan outcry resulted in a swift about-turn. Not that Campbell or Moore are terribly bothered about having their names attached to the project. They've long distanced themselves from the film, and spent the advance money. How is the self-publisher/writer/artist capitalising on the extra attention he is sure to receive? By working on a couple of short pieces for Marvel and DC, of all things!

On October 3rd, DC releases **Orion 19**, with a backup story featuring Intergang, written by Walter Simonson and illustrated by Campbell and sometime collaborator Pete Mullins.

A month later, **Uncanny X-Men 400** hits the stands. Written by Joe Casey, it will be divided up into chapters with a different artist on each. Alongside Campbell will be Bill Sienkiewicz, Ashley Wood and others.

When quizzed about why he had chosen to work on characters which are such mainstays of mainstream superhero comics, after creatively disappointing experiences on **Hellblazer** and Dark Horse's **Catalyst: Agents of Change**, Campbell said that he thought they would be fun to do. His reservations about working on long-established characters were to do with feeling locked into very restrictive continuity issues, which made it difficult to be creative. As he will only be working as the artist, he felt liberated enough to kick back and have some fun.

Campbell told **Borderline** about the X-Men assignment: "I've got a 9 year old son and I have risen astronomically on the cool register since I undertook the job."

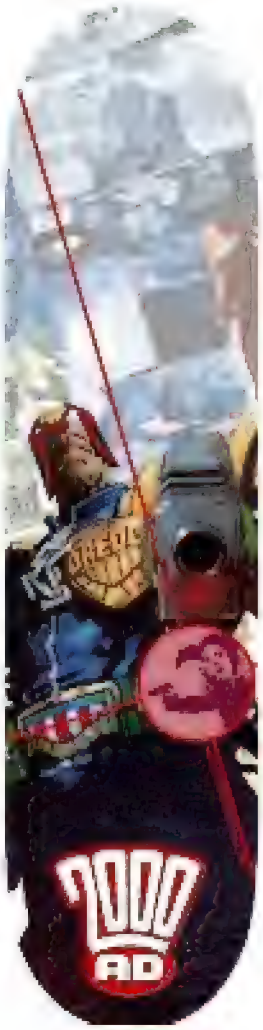
The Marvel and DC stories are by no means the only irons that Campbell has in the fire at the moment. As well as keeping **From Hell** available, he continues to publish **Eddie Campbell's Bacchus**, now in its sixth year of publishing, and this month will follow up the acclaimed adaptation of Alan Moore's spoken word performance *The Birth Caul* with another, **Snakes and Ladders**, which he describes thus: "*Snakes and Ladders* is more difficult to describe [than *The Birth Caul*] because it's not linear but it takes into its purview the origins of the universe, the pre-Raphaelite painters and Arthur Machen's spiritual odyssey following the death of his wife. It is about fall and resurrection, using the children's board game of the title as a metaphor."

To Boldly go...

THE biggest announcement DC had to make at Chicago's Wizard World was saved for last; the news that the entire creative team behind the wildly successful **Green Arrow** relaunch - Kevin Smith, Phil Hester and Ande Parks - are jumping ship to see if they can catch lightning in a bottle twice. Smith & co. intend to bring back **The Brave and the Bold** in 2002, some nine years after the last series was cancelled. Although the original B&B was known primarily as a Batman team-up book, Smith was quick to say that he intends to return to the original concept of the book, as two or more heroes teaming up within a story. This format would allow him free reign to play with any DC Universe characters he and the artists wanted. At this stage, very few definite appearances had been confirmed, but the book will begin with a Batman and Green Arrow story arc. Phil Hester expressed an interest in playing with the darker corners of the DC Universe, and particularly Ragman.

Smith, inspired by recent issues of **Green Arrow**'s *Quiver* storyline which teamed Oliver Queen with Batman, got the idea just before he was due at a signing appearance at the San Diego Comicon, and asked editor Bob Schreck if he could do it. Schreck immediately walked up to DC publisher Paul Levitz, and was given the go-ahead there and then.

Smith, Hester and Parks will leave their duties on **Green Arrow** shortly after they conclude the ten-part *Quiver* storyline. Smith estimated their departure would be between issues 14 and 16. At this time, no replacement team has been announced.



2000AD CD Project

FRESH from their sponsorship of the Urban Beach Skateboarding event at the London Arena on 11-12 August, Rebellion have announced plans to release a **2000AD** deck, themed around Jock's interpretation of their flagship character Judge Dredd. **Borderline** readers are among the first to see the design (pictured left).

Plans are moving at a blistering pace regarding the **2000AD archive on CD** project. Discussions with the printer are still ongoing, but the original idea as mooted on the 2000AD newsgroup, which would have put the project along the lines of the *MAD Magazine CD-Rom* with many issues collected on CD, have given way to something altogether different. While the entire archive will indeed be preserved in PDF format, there are no immediate plans to make it available commercially in this form. Instead, readers will be able to order 5 or 10 sequential progs (2000AD-speak for issues), and then a few weeks later will receive a personalised bound copy by mail order.

If all goes according to plan, this service will be offered to subscribers in September, with the official launch intended for October.

aka: Stop the press

AN employee at American Color Graphics in Sylacauga, Alabama stopped the presses as they were printing the first issue of Marvel's MAX Comics debut title **Alias** by Brian Michael Bendis and Michael Gaydos, citing the magazine as obscene. **Alias** concerns a failed superheroine who makes a living as a private detective, The first issue features a sex scene between the lead character and Luke Cage. Rumours began to circulate that the ACG employee had halted the printing because of the inter-racial nature of the scene, but it was later clarified that the graphic language had offended the printer. Bendis said in defence of his work: "I'm literally stunned. There's nothing in **Alias** that you wouldn't see on *The Sopranos*. MAX is the Marvel imprint featuring mature themes, and aimed specifically at an adult audience." In response, Marvel have switched the printing of their entire MAX Comics line to Quebecor in Canada, and the delay will not affect the shipping date for **Alias**, which will debut on September 5th.

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What's the score with Alan Moore?

IN December, Pocket Essentials are to publish the *Pocket Essential Guide to Alan Moore*. Pocket Essentials produce books on a diverse range of topics, but this is their first foray into the world of comics. Author Lance Parkin, best known for his celebrated *Doctor Who* and *Emmerdale* novels, told **Borderline**: "I'm a long-time fan of Alan Moore's, and I wanted to share some of my enthusiasm on probably my favourite writer in any medium. I thought I knew all about him, but researching the book I was amazed at some of the gaps of knowledge. The book's a critical survey of his work, and ends with what I believe is a complete bibliography, including reprints and foreign translations. It's certainly the most complete bibliography I've seen. You might think you're an Alan Moore completist, but have you got the 1983 *BJ and the Bear* Annual?"

Alan Moore: The Pocket Essential Guide is 96pp and will retail for £3.99. *www.pocketessentials.com*

New 2000AD fanzine – Zarjaz

FOLLOWING in the footsteps of **Violent!**, **Dogbreath** and especially the National Comic Award winning *Class Of '79* Judge Dredd fanzine, September 29th's 2000AD convention DreddCon 2 (http://www.dreddcon.co.uk) will see the launch of another small press British comic fanzine, by the name of **Zarjaz**. Formed by members of the Scriptdroids yahoogroup, the fanzine contains stories featuring characters from **2000AD** such as Rogue Trooper, Judge Dredd and the Mighty Tharg himself.

Scriptdroids was founded by Andrew Ness as a writing group whose aim is the improvement of submissions to **2000AD**'s *Future Shocks*, the traditional way of breaking into writing for the 'Galaxy's Greatest Comic'. **Zarjaz**, edited by Andrew Lewis, who also produces the **Top Notch Tosh** small press comic, is an outgrowth of all that enthusiasm and has the blessing of **2000AD** editor Andy Diggle.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO WEAR CLOTHES HERE. THAT'S ALL.
NO, PLEASE... DON'T YOU START!
WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM, NICOLA? I'VE SEEN YOU NAKED. YOUR MOTHER'S SEEN YOU NAKED-
MY MOTHER HAS NOT SEEN ME NAKED!
IT'S A NATURIST CITY. THE LARGEST IN THE WORLD. THERE ARE 40,000 PEOPLE HERE ENJOYING THE SUNSHINE-
40,000 PEOPLE!' 40,000 NAKED PEOPLE' THAT'S SUPPOSED TO MAKE ME FEEL BETTER!
YOU FEEL BAD?

Graphic novel breaks nude ground

A NEW graphic novel will be available soon, from an unusual source.

Screenwriter Henry Cobbold's **Wearing a Smile – A romantic comedy about nudity** is published by The 39, whose webpage www.the39.com describes the project as a "continental-style graphic novel". The site fanfares the book as "the first novel about nudity – in graphic form or otherwise – and unusual in Britain as a comic book that's not strictly for children".

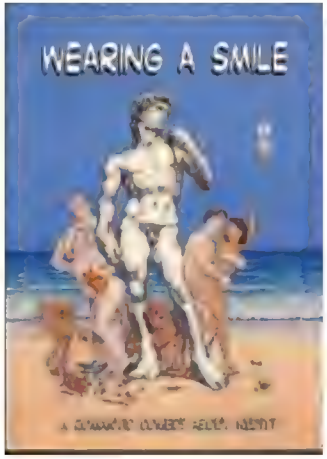
Wearing a Smile tells the story of Sylvie, the most beautiful girl in the world. Nicola, her boyfriend, would do anything for her. Anything, except go on holiday with her entire family, wearing nothing but a smile.

The new graphic novel is based on a screenplay by Henry Cobbold, screenwriter of Billy Zane's *Lake Consequence* and David Duchovny's *Red Shoe Diaries*, and illustrated by Tim Major, regular illustrator for *The New Statesman* and *The Erotic Review.*

Cobbold said: "Screenplays are a good base for graphic novels. In designing the book I was effectively directing my screenplay. I recommend the process to all screenwriters who have projects considered too adventurous by bankers or film companies."

Why make nudity the subject of the novel? "Bizarrely, everyone is fascinated by nudity. In Britain, in particular, we're scared of it, amused by it, shocked by it, turned on by it – invariably unsettled by it. We go to great lengths to suppress it, yet happily pay money to see it. Frankly, in this country, nudity is the last absurd taboo."

The novel will appear in a format familiar to foreign readers. The "Bande dessinèe album" is a continental book format most familiar to British readers via the **Tintin** and **Asterix** books.



Cobbold said: "Every bookshop in France has a large section devoted to BDs, that comprises graphic novels and comic book albums for all ages. Themes echo those of popular movie-making – adventure stories, detective thrillers, sex comedies, science fiction, horror and erotic fantasy.

"They are by no means only for children. In fact, Britain is fairly unique in believing that comics are only for kids. Graphic novels for grown-ups thrive all over the world, particularly in markets like the US and Japan. There are a few British exceptions – notably Bryan Talbot's **The Tale of One Bad Rat** – but these are usually only for young adults and typically carry a comfortable literary or educational theme."

Cobbold added that **Wearing a Smile** would be the first in a series of continental-style BDs that The 39 will publish for British and international markets.

Wearing a Smile - A romantic comedy about nudity is available worldwide from The 39's "My Favourite Shop" at *http://www.myfavouriteshop.com*. It costs £12.50 (including shipping) within Europe and £14 – about $20 – (including shipping) outside Europe.

Readers can find information on the project at *http://www.wearingasmile.com*

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Blackhawk creator dies

GOLDEN Age and Silver Age American comicbook artist Charles "Chuck" Cuidera has died, aged 86.

Born in Newark, NJ in 1915, he won a number of art awards while attending East Side High and subsequently studied art at the Pratt Institute in New York. After commencing his career as an illustrator he moved into the comics field, arriving at Edward "Busy" Arnold's Quality Comics company in 1941.

There he soon made what was to be his most lasting contribution to the history of comics, the creation of the *Blackhawk* feature which initially ran in **Military Comics** from 1941 to 1945 and in its own title from 1944 to 1968.

After having drawn the first eleven *Blackhawk* stories in **Military** he was drafted into the US Navy, eventually transferring to the USAF and ending the war with the rank of Captain. In 1945 he returned to comics and to **Blackhawk**, either drawing or inking the series from 1945 until its cancellation in 1968.

He subsequently retired from comics, establishing a new career as a city planner in his home town of Newark and finally retiring to live with his wife in Florida.

For many years historians believed that *Blackhawk* had been created by Will Eisner, but when Cuidera was interviewed for **Comicbook Marketplace** in 1999 he hotly asserted that the series was his creation. At the San Diego ComicCon in 1999 Eisner publicly acknowledged that the essential concepts of the series had been Cuidera's work.

Chuck Cuidera passed away on the evening of Saturday August 25th.

Corrigan nominated

CHRIS Ware's semi-autobiographical saga, **Jimmy Corrigan, The Smartest Boy On Earth**, has been longlisted for the **Guardian** First Book Award, the first time that a graphic novel has been considered.

The First Book Award exists in order to bring attention to and reward new writing, whether fiction or non-fiction, and the eventual winner will take home £10,000.

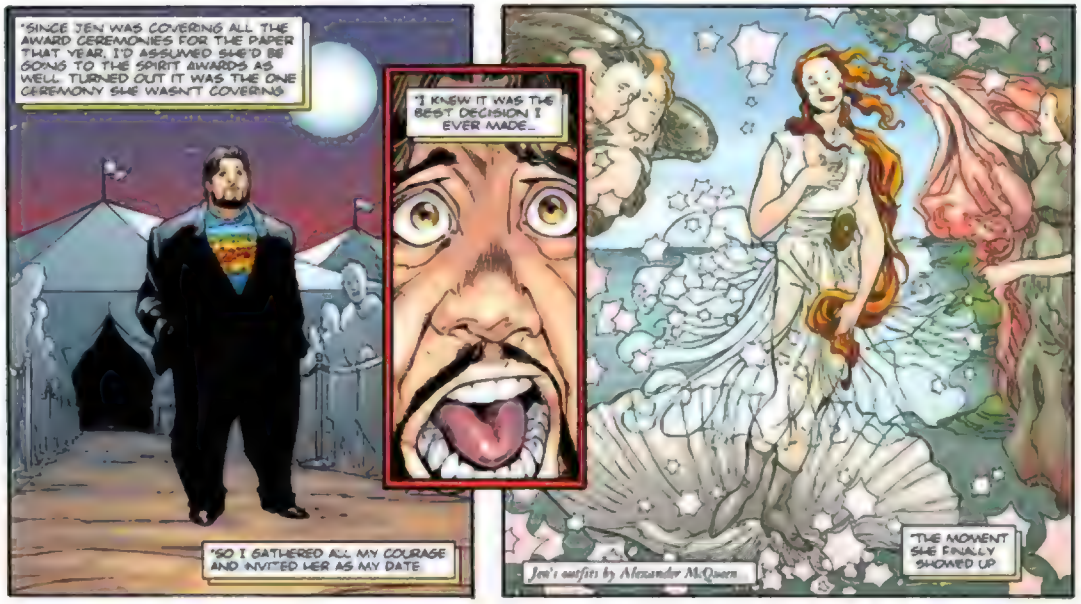
Claire Armistead, **The Guardian**'s literary editor and chairperson of the judging, described the critically acclaimed graphic novel as: "an outstanding work [which] seems to broaden the scope of graphic novels, taking them outside that ghetto."

Jimmy Corrigan is the story of an introverted wage slave's journey out to the sticks for an awkward reunion with his estranged father. The author revealed that the book can be read in almost exactly the amount of time he ever spent with his late father: four hours.

The panel of judges comprises novelists Jonathan Coe, AL Kennedy and Ahdaf Souheif, comedian/actor/

author Charlie Higson and **Guardian** editor Alan Rusbridger.

Last year's First Book Award winner Zadie Smith is a confirmed fan, commenting: "He should win immediately – I don't even care what else is on it. It's a work of genius." Nick Hornby, author of **Fever Pitch** and **High Fidelity**, is also an avowed enthusiast of the book. However, there will be stiff competition: Journalist Jon Ronson's first book **THEM: Adventures With Extremists**, Glen David Gold's well regarded **Carter Beats The Devil**, inspired by the life of the American magician Charles Carter, and Rachel Seiffert's Booker Prize longlisted **The Dark Room** are all in contention.


"SINCE JEN WAS COVERING ALL THE AWARD CEREMONIES FOR THE PAPER THAT YEAR, I'D ASSUMED SHE'D BE GOING TO THE SPIRIT AWARDS AS WELL. TURNED OUT IT WAS THE ONE CEREMONY SHE WASN'T COVERING
"I KNEW IT WAS THE BEST DECISION I EVER MADE...
"SO I GATHERED ALL MY COURAGE AND INVITED HER AS MY DATE
Jen's outfits by Alexander McQueen
"THE MOMENT SHE FINALLY SHOWED UP

Joey & Kevin do the NY Times

SCRIPTER/film director Kevin Smith has teamed up with penciler/Marvel Comics Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada to produce a special comic for the **New York Times Sunday Magazine**.

Smith wrote and Quesada pencilled a comic book story telling how Smith met his wife Jennifer, a journalist for **USA Today**, and their first kiss, entitled: *First Kiss Comics - My Date With Destiny*. The story replaced the usual weekly fashion section.

Quesada drew Jennifer wearing autumn fashions from companies including Dolce & Gabbana and Celine.

Smith is pictured as an icon of product placement, wearing his trademark sweatshirt vest, but with T-shirts bearing the trademark logos of high-profile Marvel comics.

The **New York Times** put the entire comic online, at *www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2001/08/26/magazine/26STYLE-SS_1.html*. It will also appear as a 'dotcomic' on Quesada's *www.joequesada.com* website, as the page was originally laid out.

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IN FOCUS... Small Press Comics Scene: Liverpool

David Goodman discovers a whole new world of creativity

north by northwest
COMIC
EXPRESS
FULL FATHOM 5
IN
TENTACLES OF TERROR
DATELINE: 2080: THE U.E.F. OCEAN VESSEL EXPLORER SAILS INTO TROUBLED WATERS...
HOWEVER THE STORM IS THE LEAST OF THEIR PROBLEMS!
SEND OUT A STORM DISTRESS SIGNAL!
A Production of the Ian Hering Cartoon Workshop

What are Small Press comics? There are a lot of comics creators who decide to self-publish their works. Quality and quantity can vary considerably, from tiny, photocopied mini-comics with a print run of 10 to comics with slick production values and runs of 1000 or more, covering all manner of genres, subjects and themes. But they all share a common element – motivated, enthusiastic creators who want to share their visions with the world...

MERSEYSIDE is famous for The Beatles, Liverpool FC and bad Scouser stereotypes. Less well known is that it is the birthplace of **Eagle**, which revolutionized British comics and introduced *Dan Dare* to the world. The comics scene in Liverpool has remained low key for a long time, but the city has a number of resources that make it Small Press Friendly.

The Ian Hering Comics Workshop at The City of Liverpool Community College has two evening courses dealing with cartoons (single image gags) and comics (sequential art and graphic storytelling). How many other colleges can boast courses like that? It's a great place to meet other people who are interested in making comics.

It also offers free photocopying and printing facilities, making it very easy to produce your own mini-comics. There are regular exercises in drawing strips throughout the year, so even if you don't yet have an idea for your own comic, you have the opportunity to get some work published in one form or another. Each year, the Workshop produces **Comic Express**, a themed anthology for which every course member is encouraged to produce a strip.

If you get your work published there is then the issue of where to sell it. Worlds Apart comic shop happily stocks small-press comics but there are alternative routes to try as well. The publishers of local comic **Square Eyed Stories** put a few copies (5-10) of one issue into a variety of different specialty shops to see how well it would sell to different targets.

Not surprisingly, no copies were sold from shops where the comic was not clearly visible, tucked away in a corner or behind other magazines. Sales from skate and skate clothing shops were very poor, despite being clearly visible on the counter. At a Feminist/Alt-Lit bookshop, where it was placed on a rack with magazines, two copies of five were sold. An alt rock clothes shop had a stand marked "all things 50p" - the **Square Eyed Stories** cover price - where a good four copies sold out of five. No copies had been sold at a Heavy Metal music shop, but there had been sales there previously. Sales were relatively good at a pub, also with a Metal/Rock/Goth clientele. Although the copies were tucked between two cash tills, people had asked for it by name!

So, visibility is important. If no one can see it, no one can buy it. Getting the name out and known is also important. The **Square Eyed Stories** team is going to put up posters in each shop that agrees to sell it, and future considerations include getting colour covers. I would recommend that all Small Pressers/Self-Publishers look beyond the local comic shop for potential sales locations. They may also help spread awareness to a wider section of the community.

Since Feb 2000, Liverpool has had an annual comics convention, Merseycon. This is a great place for small-press creators in Liverpool to promote themselves and their work and make contacts with industry pros. The **Pulp Kitchen** anthology series started just before the first Merseycon and, by the end of the day, had sold out, raising enough funds to print issue #2 and a little more! The publishers had also met some people who would later become contributors and core-team members.

Even libraries have picked up on the comics scene. The Liverpool Central Library has a Graphic Novel section containing, as well as a few **Judge Dredd** and superhero books, a selection of indies ranging from **Bone**, **Skeleton Key** and **Strangers in Paradise** to **Cerebus** and manga collections.

Things are looking positive for the comics culture in Liverpool. We at least have a foundation laid. Now all we have to do is build on it.

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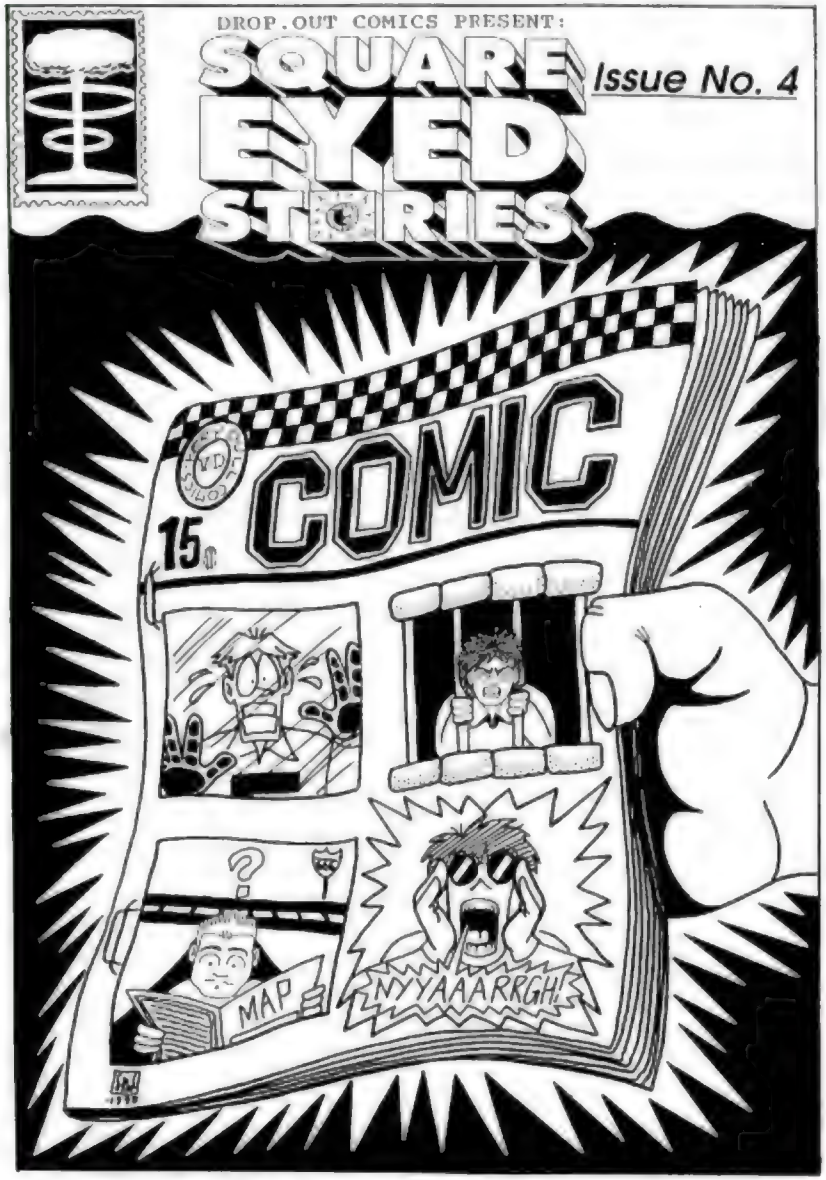
For more information on the Liverpool Small Press scene, contact:

Ian Haring Comics Workshop – City of Liverpool Community College

The Arts Centre, 9 Myrtle Street

Liverpool L7 7JA

http://www.liv-coll.ac.uk/



LIVERPOOL SMALL PRESS TITLES INCLUDE:

Square Eyed Stories – started by members of the Comics Workshop in 1997, this is a cheap and cheerful humour anthology. **Square Eyed Stories** still retains strong ties to the Comics Workshop. *www.squareeyedstories.co.uk*

Killer Bunny Comics – Action/ Adventure anthology that appeared briefly in 1999 Available from Pulp Kitchen, below.

Pulp Kitchen – Chunky anthology inspired by **The Eagle**. A varied mix of humour, action, slice-of-life, superheroes and other bits and pieces. The Pulp Kitchen comics collective avidly recruits other local small pressers to their cause, with the aim of sharing resources and providing a sense of community. *www.pulpkitchen.50megs.com*

Ugo – Semi-autobiographical newspaper-style humour strips about a black teenager, his annoying little sister and two crafty goldfish. From the very talented Ugo Nwosu.

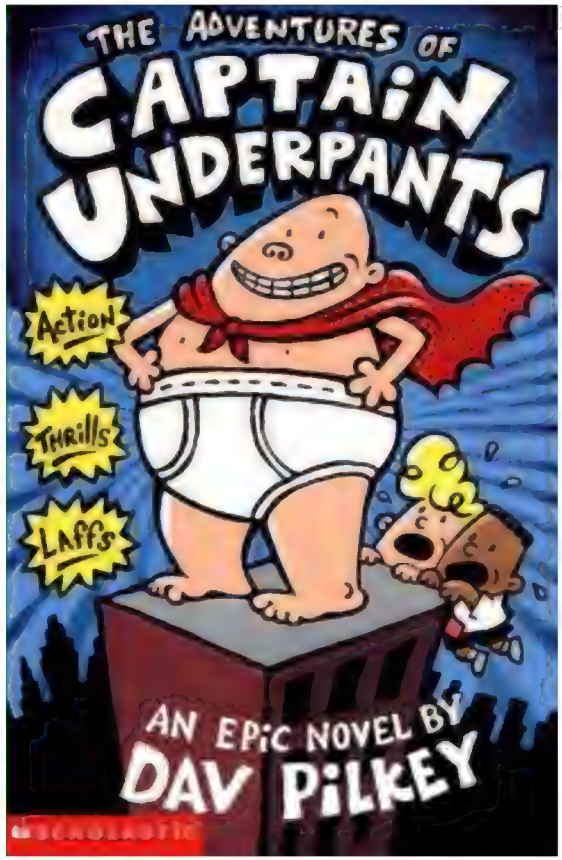
Bio Mecha – Manga-style SF romantic comedy by Laura Watton, a veteran of the UK Anime fanzine scene.

Eggtown, **Eggworld** - simple and surreal stories about anthro-pomorphised eggs. By Jonah Stevenson and Mafu Morgan Contact: *vategg@hotmail.com*

BLINKERS OFF

Pete Ashton delves into areas comics dealers rarely reach

Kids books can be for comics readers!



COMICS being relatively young and frequently derided, aficionados are often keen to make connections with other media. Comparisons are frequently made with film and while some comics are said to be "cinematic" and films damned with the "comic book" label, there is very little in the technical structure of films and comics that overlaps.

One medium that comics are rarely compared with is children's picture books. Certainly, a fair proportion of picture books cannot be called comics. Most have a single image with one paragraph of text - no sequential panels, no transition from image to image. But sometimes, and more frequently than you'd imagine, something arrives on the scene that is, if not a pure comic, then very close to one.

The links between comics and some picture books frequently comes from the authors. While researching this piece I discovered that Bostonian Ted Dewan, whose books are UK bestsellers, links to Scott McCloud on his web site http://www.wormworks.com/ and was involved with the British indy anthology **Inkling** in the mid 90s. Dav Pilkey (http://www.pilkey.com/) wears his comics influences on his sleeve with his popular Captain Underpants series, featuring the mini-comics made by the eight year old characters.

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Above: pages from the new Raymond Brigg's illustrated novel, ***Ug: Boy Genius of the Stone Age.***

Elements of comics grammar pop up all the time. Word balloons is a popular device, as is sequential transitions between 2 or 3 images on a page. It could be my personal bias but it seems those books which use comics to stretch the potential of the picture book format are more engaging, whether it be Jonathan Allen's retelling of **The Ugly Duckling**, where the "panels" are flaps embedded in the page, or the smooth panel transitions of Ian Beck's **The Teddy Robber**.

While those examples are interesting and prompt questions about the value of comics in education as well as their structural possibilities, they are not, strictly speaking, comics. Last month I talked about Posy Simmonds, who does produce comics and sells them to the masses without them realising it. Talk of Posy Simmonds inevitably leads to Raymond Briggs, who, for decades, has been producing comic books and passing them off as children's books.

Briggs is something of an institution in the UK and has become famous around the world since his book **The Snowman** was adapted as a film. At school he wanted to be a cartoonist but was advised that this was not a wise career move and to study fine art instead. Of his time at the Slade School of Fine Art he said "I discovered what painting really was and realised I was not a painter at all. For years I had been barking up the wrong tree. I was a natural born illustrator."

He started his career illustrating other people's books, which were so bad he soon began to write his own. In the 1970s he created his three most enduring children's books: **Father Christmas**, **Fungus the Bogeyman** and **The Snowman**. The 1980s saw Briggs moving into more political themes with **When The Wind Blows**, an exquisite account of an elderly couple coping with a nuclear attack, and **The Tin-Pot Foreign General and the Old Iron Woman**, his bitter attack on the hypocrisy surrounding the Falklands War. Interestingly, people bought these for their children even though they were not children's books.

By the 1990s it seemed Briggs had mellowed slightly, dealing more with the technical aspects of his work and deeper themes. I was amused to read the publisher's blurb for 1994's **The Man**; "It breaks new ground in its treatment of the relationship between word and image" - in that the story is told entirely in dialogue. Similarly his account of the lives of his parents and the social history of post-war Britain, **Ethel and Ernest** (published as an "adult" book), has been hailed as a masterpiece but never as a cartoon strip or comic. It would appear that Briggs' success has given reviewers and readers a selective blindness. They don't know they're reading a comic.

His new book, published this month, is **Ug: Boy Genius of the Stone Age**, and it's another classic. Ug is a cave boy of unprecedented intelligence. He questions why everything is made of stone, why they don't bring fire into the cave, why they chase animals around rather than keeping them in one place, and why he can't have soft trousers instead of the sandstone ones his father made for him. Dugs, his mother, is at her wits' end as her weird son keeps going on about alien concepts like "soft" and "nice" and "warm". "Mark my words - he'll go mad that boy. He'll end up painting animals on the walls". Obviously Ug represents every bright child whose dreams of a better world have been brutally crushed by the cynicism of adults and their inability to dream. However, unlike the vast majority of picture books it's a very dark piece with no happy ending or upbeat message. Briggs is saying to his readership that they're going to get you and destroy your dreams because they're stupid. Watch out.

As with all picture books and illustrated novels that are not about traditional comic book archetypes like superheroes or action adventure, the publishers of **Ug** don't mention that it is, completely and utterly, a comic. This is probably because they don't need to. Briggs' name is enough to sell it and his readers are so used to his "unique style" that they don't need to be told what they're reading.

Looking back on Raymond Briggs' career, and surveying the range of children's picture books available, it is interesting to see how varied they are. More pertinently, it's intriguing to see how some of the better ones have evolved into something resembling comics. Until the recent explosion of Harry Potter books and the Booker nomination of author Philip Pullman, children's books were seen as pretty low down the scale, with picture books even more so. And yet they are a hotbed of creativity, playing with ways to use pictures and words to tell a story and engage young minds. Comic books have been disregarded as juvenile rubbish and ignored by the cultural elite and yet they have produced wonderful, innovative works. Is there a pattern here? BL

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PRODUCTION LINES

Tom Lennon explores the world of Comics 2 Film

JODOROWSKY'S NUTS
The Sacred Origin of The Jodoverse

OUR industry is in the grip of something weird; high-profile creators from the glamorous world of film and television are doing the decent thing and evolving into comics pros. However, while the likes of Kevin Smith and J. Michael Straczynski make the headlines, taking drastic cuts in salary to fulfil their childhood dreams, in Europe this particular media migration path is nothing new. With Marvel's editor-in-chief Joe Quesada trawling Hollywood in search of fresh filmboy recruits - looking to replace jaded hacks with bright, young talent - it's worth remembering that one of the hottest titles in the market today was created by a movie-making, Eurocomics vet in his seventies. Alexandro Jodorowsky - writer of the critically acclaimed hit **The Metabarons** - has carved out a unique career for himself as the creator of cult, controversial movies and crazed, uncompromising, visually stunning comics. While his Hollywood counterparts are content with rejuvenating the superhero genre by breathing new life into a bunch of middle-aged icons, Jodorowsky has created a complex fictional universe of interconnected characters, concepts and stories that are uniquely his own. Fans call it "The Jodoverse" and, in the words of Warren Ellis, it's "astonishingly beautiful and totally mad."

For the uninitiated, **The Metabarons** is a science-fiction epic that chronicles the rise of the eponymous protagonists from humble stonecutters on a marble planet to the galaxy's most formidable warriors. Brutally violent, emotionally-charged and almost operatic in tone - with deeply passionate, multi-layered characters - it's a generation-spanning adventure of heroism, sacrifice, blood and honour. Published in the US by Humanoids - and featuring sumptuous art by the veteran Argentinean painter Juan Giminez - it combines solid storytelling rich in subtext with jaw-dropping visuals. Despite a relatively quiet US launch last year, the series has become both a critical and commercial success, attracting rave reviews, endorsements by top comics pros and a word-of-mouth buzz that continues to entice new readers and deplete back issues stocks. Oh, and it also happens to be completely insane. With **The Metabarons** you never know what demented notion, wild concept or surreal image Jodorowsky and Giminez will smack you over the eyes with next. It might be a huge fleet of alien vessels hidden within a fake planet, or perhaps a coven of scheming witches who travel through space on a giant fish. It might even be a floating boy who mutilates his feet in a crusher only so he can earn the respect of his father and stand and fight like a man. To quote Ellis again, "There is literally a new and mad idea on every page."

Such buggier-than-batshit craziness isn't a trait that's unique to **The Metabarons**, however. Jodorowsky, after all, made his name directing bizarre cult movies like *El Topo*, *The Holy Mountain* and *Santa Sangre*. He is a man who claimed that "most directors make films with their eyes; I make films with my testicles." Applying the same maxim to his comics, it's little wonder they're *nuts*. His fiery, feverish imagination permeates and saturates The Jodoverse, and unlike the work of other media migrants, his comics - with their combination of visceral imagery and esoteric depth - are thematically inseparable from his movies. Both are the culmination of a lifetime of artistic experimentation, reflecting his passionate obsession with self-transformation, mysticism, religion and violence. In this sense, The Jodoverse is a continuation of the same artistic alchemy by different means.

Few comic creators have entered the field via a route quite as colourful and circuitous as that of Jodorowsky. Born in Chile in 1929, he left his home country at the age of 24 with a troupe of travelling puppeteers, eventually settling in Paris. There he collaborated with the legendary mime artist Marcel Marceau, wrote stage plays for the actor Maurice Chevalier and introduced composer Michel Legrand to Parisian audiences. In Paris Jodorowsky met a group of artists who shared his interest in Modern Art, Eastern mysticism and the occult and together they formed the guerilla art movement "The Theatre of Panic". Seeing themselves as natural heirs to the Surrealists, they embraced many of the things their heroes rejected, including science fiction, rock music and - quite tellingly - comic books. During the 1960s Jodorowsky moved to Mexico, where besides directing stage plays he continued this initial courtship with our medium by writing and drawing a weekly comic strip called **Fabulas Panicas** for one of Mexico's leading newspapers.

Sadly, this affair had to be put on hold once Jodorowsky got involved with the fledgling "Mexperimental Cinema" scene. His first film, 1967s *Fando Y Lis*, almost resulted in him getting lynched by a crowd of outraged Mexicans for its perceived attack on traditional values. He followed it up with *El Topo* [1970], a mystical, allegorical, dreamlike Western (or, more accurately, "Eastern") which made his name internationally. A stylish head-on collision between the spaghetti westerns of Sergio Leone and the Surrealist cinema of Luis Bunuel - a sort of 'Fistful of Dalis' - *El Topo* is a brutal film brimming with violent sexual imagery, Taoist philosophy, hilariously blatant phallic symbolism and dwarves. Upon its release in the US the following year it quickly gained a cult following on the midnight movie circuit; John Lennon called it a masterpiece and convinced his notorious manager, Allen Klein, to produce Jodorowsky's next film, *The*

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Holy Mountain [1974].

Already, the thematic overlap between Jodorowsky's films and his later comics work was evident. The spiritual quest - a theme that dominates all three films - would be further explored in his seminal comics series **The Incal**. In *El Topo*, the hero has to prove himself by killing the four masters of the desert, representing the four obstacles to the evolution of man, foreshadowing the scene in **The Incal** where protagonist John DiFool has to reconcile his four conflicting spiritual elements. Transcendence through pain is another example; the Metabarons, with their initiation through mutilation and inherited bird-shaped birthmark, echo strongly his 1989 film *Santa Sangre*, in which the youthful protagonist painfully 'inherits' a bird-shaped tattoo from his father. The essential, controlling idea behind these themes is change: "All my comics, all my movies, they are the starting of a change in all levels." While this helps to outline the unity in Jodorowsky's oeuvre, however, it doesn't begin to explain the actual genesis of The Jodoverse. For that, we must turn to one of the most influential science-fiction films never made.

Jodorowsky's *Dune* is one of those legendary unmade films - like Orson Welles' *Don Quixote* or Terry Gilliam's *Watchmen* - that cinephiles will speculate about in hushed, reverential tones for years to come. Based on the classic science fiction novel by Frank Herbert, the film was going to be a colossal project; Pink Floyd, at the peak of their creativity, agreed to score the soundtrack while a bizarre cast was assembled that included Salvador Dali, Gloria Swanson and the aforementioned Welles. Jodorowsky also gathered about him an unprecedented cadre of artists to help bring the story to life; a young Dan O'Bannon was hired as special effects supervisor, while Swiss artist H.R. Giger and French comics legend Jean "Moebius" Giraud designed characters, environments and storyboards for the film. According to Jodorowsky, he and Moebius formed an instant bond while working on the film; "We worked eight hours a day on that film, for months and months. We were both in total resonance with each other. Moebius drew so fast that it was just incredible. His pen almost miraculously created all the travellings, the panning shots, the zooms I wanted. Through three thousand plus drawings he did for *Dune*, I could feel just as if I had actually shot the picture. Anyone looking at his work would feel that they had experienced the film as fully as if they had seen it on a screen in a theatre."

Which, of course, was just as well for after two years of hard work the project ground to a halt. Herbert was outraged with Jodorowsky, accusing the director of using his novel as a springboard for an exploration of his personal obsessions, and the financial backing dried up. The significance of the film, however, was in its failure; it became a major creative catalyst. O'Bannon, Moebius and Giger subsequently hooked up with Ridley Scott to create the classic movie *Alien*, and Jodorowsky and Moebius started making comics.

The cult horror story **The Eyes of The Cat** was their first comics collaboration - a fine work in its own right, but ultimately overshadowed by the magnum opus that was to follow. Conceived by Jodorowsky in a dream, and originally released in English by Marvel's Epic imprint in the late 1980s, **The Incal** contained many of the idiosyncratic story concepts from the *Dune* movie that Herbert found so objectionable. It also formed the source text for all subsequent forays into the Jodoverse by providing a thematic template and introducing comics fans to characters like The Metabaron and The Technopriests. It tells the story of John DiFool - a grubby Private Eye living in a nightmare subterranean dystopia some 30,000 years in the future - who finds himself the reluctant protagonist in a surreal sci-fi yarn of breathtaking cosmic proportions. At the heart of the story is the quintessential Jodotheme of transformation; DiFool, according to Jodorowsky, "never stops changing. He metamorphoses, progresses, sometimes regresses." The series, in fact, gathered together all the elements that characterised his movies and fascinated him throughout his life - the spiritual quest, violent transcendence, sexual and esoteric symbolism - then cranked them up to a cosmic scale in a beautiful synthesis of word and image. **The Incal** continues to inspire many of today's top creators - **Ultimate X-Men** scribe Mark Millar calls it "one of most perfect comics ever conceived" - and it was successful enough to spawn both a prequel and a sequel. **Avec L'Incal** - a sort of thinking person's *Phantom Menace* - was created in collaboration with Moebius' protégé Zoran Janjetov and examined the early life of John DiFool. More recently, the original creative team was reunited for the eagerly awaited **Apres L' Incal**, the latest volume of which generated the equivalent of $1.5 million in sales during its first week of publication in Europe.

The entire Incal saga is now being serialised in the US by Humanoids Publishing, which is hoping to repeat the success of **The Metabarons**. As Joe Quesada flicks through his rolodex looking for more hot film-making talent to add to his ranks, he might want to spare a thought for this fiery, Chilean filmboy veteran. While his movies - with their surreal blend of violent transformations, mystics and midgets - aren't to everyone's taste, there's at least one discontinued Marvel comic that might be suited to his unique talents. With Richard Corben now drawing The Hulk, can Alexandro Jodorowsky's **Alpha Flight** really be that far away? BL

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THE DORAN INTERVIEW

A NOT SO DISTANT VOICE

COLLEEN Doran *started her career as a professional artist at the tender age of fifteen, when she was scouted by an advertising agency at a science fiction convention that was displaying her art. She freelanced for some time until she was able to leave college during her sophomore year in order to become a full time comic artist. Her first project was the science fiction fantasy* ***A Distant Soil****, based on characters she had been illustrating for years, but after creative and editorial differences with her publisher she abandoned the series only to revive the property from the beginning for another publisher. She has since continued the series through her own company Aria Press and now through Image. During the intervening years, she has provided art for projects as diverse as* ***Sandman****,* ***The Legion of Super-Heroes****, Marvel's X-titles and adaptations of novels by Anne Rice and of Disney's Beauty and the Beast. Upon the release of the third collection of* ***A Distant Soil****, she took time out of her busy schedule to give the following interview to* Nigel Lowrey*...*

BORDERLINE: You're probably still best known for your work on ***A Distant Soil****. When you left WaRP you started the whole series from scratch again. Was that an easy thing to do or a chore retelling the same story?*

COLLEEN DORAN: Well, I was pretty nervous. I had been very vocal about my dissatisfaction with the way the WaRP thing went and when I left, it was a case of put up or shut up. I had all the rights to the book which, as the real creator, I was entitled to, but now I could show that all my claims about being able to do the book better than it had been done at WaRP had to be proven.

Fortunately, I was able to do that. I am getting more recognition for the series now than ever. The reviews have been universally positive and rewriting and redrawing the series has been nothing but an improvement.

However, there was a period where I was so emotional over the whole lawsuit thing, which dragged on for many years, that I would be frozen with nerves every time I sat down to do the book. I was pretty devastated by all of it. WaRP wanted to own all rights to my book and even though I knew I would be able to win in court, it took many years of legal battles to deal with it. It was very upsetting. I really let it get to me. If I had been older and more experienced I would have brushed it off, but at the time I was pretty broken up about it. I used to get sick to my stomach every time I sat down to work. It was a big mess.

I don't feel like redoing **A Distant Soil** was a chore. It was more a case of getting dirt out of it. I can look at every page and not think, "This was rewritten. The editor did that. Some other artist was brought in to redo that painting" Stuff like that used to drive me crazy. It's no longer an issue since I threw it all away and started over. Now I know that every page is mine. This is my choice telling the story, not someone who doesn't really care about my book making arbitrary changes that screw up continuity or trying to force me to write or draw the way they would have done it.

It's a great feeling to have redone the book. I honestly have no anger about what went on at WaRP now, and I think much of that is because I got to start over clean. I'm glad I did it.

BL: So how do you look upon your work in those early WaRP issues now?

CD: Well, some of it is pretty good. The first few pages of the first issue, those pages are the work of a kid, a teenager. It's solid work, especially for a kid. But as my relationship with WaRP deteriorated, so did my work. Instead of improving with time, I got worse. There are several issues of the book that are just bad, amateurish. By the end of the series, I started to improve again but the whole situation was very bad for the quality of my work. Drawing became painful. Emotionally painful. The thing I loved best in the world, drawing, became a nightmare for me. It was hard to face the drawing board every day, I was so unhappy.

I spent about a year after leaving WaRP deconstructing my style and stripping away all the rendering I had been doing. I believe I was the only person dopey enough to do a comic from fully rendered pencils, and few people have even tried that because it is so difficult. I spent five days on the first page of **A Distant Soil** and it is still a good drawing today, but who has five days to do one page of comic art?

I realised I was hiding a multitude of sins under the rendering of the pencils, so after leaving WaRP I turned away from that style and tore it apart. My work became all about line. This forced me to face my drawing deficiencies. It made me a better artist over time, but for a while there, whew! What bad art I was turning out! I did some embarrassing early stuff at Marvel and DC, I can tell you!

BL: Your art on ***A Distant Soil*** *is probably your strongest comic art. Is*

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that because you're more impassioned or because you're not being inked by another artist, or coloured, or working to stricter deadlines, and so on?

CD: Well, I am much easier on myself about deadlines on **A Distant Soil**. I no longer force myself to do a bimonthly book like I did when I first went to Image. Some of my early Image issues weren't as sharp as they should have been and I spent a lot of time touching up those pages before they were reprinted in the graphic novels! Of course, that was some years back and I could easily do that level of quality on the art today on a bimonthly book, but I couldn't afford to give up all my other paying work!

I also do a lot of the drawing in the inks. I don't do full pencils, just straight from a series of doodles to lettering to ink. I can make changes and tweak the art however I like as I go. I have a lot of freedom I don't have on other books. And of course, I am the best inker for my work.

I am impassioned about many of my jobs. I was wild about the **Wonder Woman** graphic novel I did a few years back and I loved the **Mutant X Annual**. I really knocked myself out on those pencil jobs, which are among my best. But I rarely find an inker who is as devoted to my work as I am! I gladly spend sixteen hours on a page of pencils, but rarely find an inker willing to do the same! That's just the way it is. I save copies of my pencils so I can always look back at them to know how a book was supposed to look!

BL: Does this mean you have any preferred inkers? Or any that you'd sooner shoot than let near your work again?

CD: My pencils are very difficult for inkers. They are super tight. I had one inker call an editor to complain about how difficult they were. Another inker phoned my agent to tell him I was crazy for doing the work I do. Even some of the editors think I am a little over-enthusiastic. I turned in a job to Heidi MacDonald last year and she phoned me saying, "Colleen, you are fucking crazy!", because of the level of work I had put into a little two page job. Labour doesn't bother me. I pride myself on the amount or effort I put into my work.

Terry Austin is good for me. He did a knockout job on an unpublished sequel to the **Fallen Angels** miniseries that was so gorgeous, it is downright heartbreaking to me that it never saw print. We did about 100 pages together. This was back in 1988, I think. I spent over a year out of circulation working on it but for reasons that have nothing to do with me or Terry, it was shelved. It was a real shame. I think if it had come out, fans would have loved it. It was very different, but there is nothing to be done. I even did an oil painting for it! What a shame. Terry also inked me on a **Marvel Fanfare** job I really liked.

*BL: I remember waiting for that series for ages based solely on one panel from it that was printed in **Marvel Age**. Why was it abandoned? I really liked your redesign of Ariel...*

CD: Thank you. There was some kind of dispute between the writer and the editor. I can't get into any gory details, but I do remember getting a call from Bob Harras. He didn't approve of some of the content of the story and asked if I would be interested in doing a rewrite myself or working with another writer. I was, personally, very loyal to the writer at the time and wouldn't hear of it. Bob didn't want to continue the project with that writer so he shelved it. That's all I know.

The details of what it was he had an objection to in the story are probably best left unsaid, but if I had known my refusal to work with another writer would have resulted in the project being shelved, I would have agreed to work with another writer. It was work for hire after all, and I could understand some of Marvel's reservations about the content. You would too if you knew what they were, but it wouldn't be fair to divulge unpublished story details, I think. Ironically, I haven't had any contact with that writer in nearly a decade, so my loyalty was pretty misguided! I should have been more concerned about what was best for the project. I feel like a dope, really. I used to make a lot of emotional decisions like that, but I would never make such a mistake today unless I was adamant about some moral point. There wasn't any moral point in this case, so I behaved foolishly, I think. It did not cost me, it cost Terry Austin. I am very sorry about that.

BL: Other than Terry, which other artists do you feel mesh well with your pencils?

CD: I also like Bob Wiacek, who also inked me on a **Marvel Fanfare**. He respects, and is able to follow my line, in a way most inkers simply cannot. Malcolm Jones III did a fantastic job on my **Sandman** #20 art. Some people didn't like the change, but I pencil different jobs differently and intended it to be a departure from my usual style. I really loved Malcolm.

*BL: I always assumed that he had drowned out your work, but you are able to deliberately shift your drawing style. Most artists attempting this would usually fail and still produce similar-looking work. How easy is it for you to switch between your usual, **A Distant Soil**, style to the grainier style you use when you work with Neil Gaiman, or the Disney style, for example?*

CD: I have no problem. Maybe a day or two of disorientation, but otherwise it is so natural to me to zip around in different styles, the real surprise to me is that other people can't do it.

I consider cartooning as being a lot like acting and every book is a different role. The book isn't about me and my ego. My job is to do what's right for the book. Whatever that is, that's what I try to do to the best of my ability.

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*BL: Shifting away from your art, the writing in **A Distant Soil** is very complex, with strong characterisation and intricate lies and half-truths affecting the reader's perception of the story they are reading. I can't think of any other writer who makes you value the validity of what characters say, not in comics anyway. Do you consider yourself a strong writer and are you comfortable with it? For instance, would you write a script for somebody else to draw?*

CD: I never considered myself a good writer until Harlan Ellison told me so. I had no confidence in my own abilities. I still have a lack of confidence. Early in my career, I got so much negative feedback from other professionals about my writing that it really burned my confidence and I think I am still carrying that baggage. Now I get many wonderful compliments from creators I truly respect, but in the back of my mind I am always wondering if they are just being nice!

When I first started in comics, what I was trying to do with **A Distant Soil** was so different, no-one quite knew how to take what I was attempting. They kept trying to get me to follow the common comic book writing formula and that's not what I wanted to do. I knew it wasn't right for my work. I even had one writer rail at me one day. This was back in 1994. I think it was Scott McCloud who had just told me that he thought I was an even better writer than I was an artist and I was sort of glowing about that. Then this other writer turned around and let me have it. She just barked at me, "I wish I'd never encouraged you to write!" and started railing at me, saying I wasn't a writer, that I was kidding myself and I hadn't paid my dues. I didn't deserve any acclaim for my work. That lecture really got to me. I felt terrible.

Then, a couple of years back I was at Charlotte Heroes Con and one of the organisers came up to me and said Harlan Ellison wanted me on the writers panel. My first thought was that he wanted me up there as the bad example! How messed up is that? What good self esteem I have! But he got up there and said, "Colleen Doran is a terrific writer!" and I almost cried. I respected Harlan as a writer so much. I was so worried what he might think of my work that I never sent it to him because I never wanted to know I didn't have his good opinion. Then, there was Harlan, in front of a big auditorium full of people, telling everyone I was a "terrific writer". I'll never forget it as long as I live.

I have the confidence now to write for someone else, but when I'd been offered jobs in the past, I turned them all down. I even turned down the writing job on **Wonder Woman** years back! I would not be so reticent today.

I have to add that much of what I am able to accomplish as a writer in **A Distant Soil** is the direct result of my ability to combine the word with the visual storytelling I am doing. A lot of the important information is in the character's body language. Most artists are terrible at body language. They just have a set of rote poses that don't convey any real information. To me, the "acting" the characters do visually is just as important as what is coming out of their mouths. If there is one thing I can't stand about most comic artists, it's what bad actors they are. You can see that they don't care about body language at all. It really destroys my enjoyment of a comic when the acting is off. You can look at a character's face in **A Distant Soil** and know what he is thinking whether there is a word balloon or not, or whether the word balloon contradicts what the character's body language is telling you. You ought to be able to tell who you are looking at, even if you see nothing but a silhouette. You ought to know what their faces are telling you and sometimes the face is telling you one thing and the hands are telling you another. To me, this information is important, but I don't really know of any other artists who spend much time on it.

It bugs me.

*BL: So how tightly is **A Distant Soil** plotted out? Do you have a loose general direction or very specific hooks for each issue?*

CD: I know where the story is going, but I couldn't tell you exactly what will happen from one issue to another since I never know how many pages a sequence will take to tell until I draw it.

*BL: You announced recently that the current **A Distant Soil** is only the first of four story arcs and is due to conclude soon, but it will be followed by three graphic novels that will complete the saga. What can you say about the intended format and frequency of these specials?*

CD: That depends entirely in how the series does financially. When I have to invest a lot of money in the book like I just did by having to go to press with three graphic novels at once, I have to cut back on the **A Distant Soil** comics and do more work for other publishers to pay the bills. But when the book is doing well financially, I can increase production. The sales on the graphic novels have been going up substantially lately, so I am hopeful that I will do well enough with them to dedicate a little more time to the series. I intend to continue to do work for other publishers regardless since I believe it is good for my work overall, but I wish I had more time for **A Distant Soil**.

*BL: Will you ever return to **Seasons of Spring**? Those short backup stories featuring the childhood of Jason and Liana in early issues of **A Distant Soil** were very well observed slices of family life and were very popular with readers...*

CD: Oh, definitely. I will do a new **Seasons of Spring** graphic novel. It will be Volume V of **A Distant Soil**. I will take the backup stories that were already published and continue them. I should be adding about 150 pages to what I have already drawn.

BL: Ever since the difficult split from WaRP, you've handled the business aspect of your work very well. Is that something you enjoy or is it just a necessary evil?

CD: I am much happier to have the business knowledge and skills that I have today! It is a necessary evil, and I would rather be drawing but at least I know what's going on!

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BL: So how much time does the business eat up? What's the ratio of business to art in an average day's work?

CD: I spend way too much time on the business right now. About four hours or more. That is not common. Usually it's almost all art, but whenever I spend weeks just drawing the business falls behind! Then I have to play catch up!

*BL: A few years ago, you did a small printing of a project you wrote called **101 Things Your Publisher Doesn't Want You To Know** in support of the Comic Book Legal Defence Fund, and ever since you've been asked for copies. They sold out really fast, so will you ever do a full production run for it?*

CD: I don't know. It would mean re-researching the whole thing again. There have been many changes in the law. The research could take a year or more. I'd rather be drawing!

*BL: You've already begun to devise your follow up projects to **A Distant Soil**, can you talk about those?*

CD: **Daughters of the Wind** is more cartoony and intended for children. It is a very sweet fairy tale about a group of girls from around the world who are chosen by the four winds to save Gaea. It's cute!

Blessed is quite different from **Daughters**. It is a supernatural police drama. I have an advantage with this tale since many of the men in my family are or were policemen. My father is now a chief. I am drawing on the rich vein of direct experience to do this story which I came up with on the way to a police funeral. One of the men my brother worked closely with on the police department was shot to death. It happened right across the street from where I live. Another officer, who lived in my condo, was shot to death a few weeks later. Both men were shot in the back. It was pretty horrible. I came up with this story while I was in the funeral entourage. I think I may actually do this story first since I have such an intense emotional connection to the material. I am dying to get it out. I don't think I have any choice really. It is haunting me!

*BL: Moving away from your own projects, how did you get the job on **X-Men Unlimited** and can you give any details of the story you'll be illustrating?*

CD: Well, I decided to give Marvel a buzz and ask if any work was coming available! The first editor I called had a job! That simple! I don't think I should give out any story details though, but I will be inking it! I am going up to Marvel next week. I can't wait to get to started!

BL: Actually, you've done a fair bit of work for the X-office before and Marvel in general, as well as DC and other publishers, so what do you think of the job Joe Quesada is doing? It's interesting that it's an artist and not the usual writer who has been made editor in chief and created the biggest buzz for Marvel in years...

CD: Well, I think Quesada has brought a degree of excitement to the company that has been lacking for awhile. I'm sure most people would agree. I am annoyed by all the negativity out there. Quesada is trying to liven things up and get people motivated. I like that. He is open to new things. I wish him luck!

*BL: In general then, how do you select which projects to accept? Do you actively search out projects, like calling Marvel and snagging **X-Men Unlimited** for instance, or do you just pick from the cream of what offers come your way?*

CD: Both. If I stumble over something, I take it. If there is something I want, I go for it. I find I am better off stumbling than going for it because I almost never get the stuff I really want!

BL: You've said before that your work is more popular with anime and manga fans than the general comic fan. How did you become interested in manga in the first place?

CD: I remember that very well! I had been friends with Leslie Sternbergh, who is an underground artist and a sometime **MAD Magazine** creator. We met when I was a kid through the pages of the Legion of Super-Heroes APA, Interlac. When **A Distant Soil** first started coming out, I made a trip to NY. I stayed with Leslie and she had some manga in her apartment. She showed them to me saying, "This reminds me of your work!" Well, it was a revelation to me. Here was a whole country full of comics doing all the things I wanted to do! Every time I tried to do those things in my own work, people came down on me like I was committing some kind of sacrilege! Yet here was a whole country that had a flourishing manga industry whose aesthetic sense was very similar to mine.

The storytelling techniques, the use of symbolism, the sense of line were all there in my work, but everyone told me it was wrong for me to write and draw that way!

The worst thing that could have happened to one of my detractors was that I became familiar with manga! From then on, when people told me to stop doing what I was doing with my work, I just dug my heels in. I knew I was right and I had a whole industry in another country that told me I was right. It took years, but I got the last laugh.

BL: You were actually invited to Japan as a special guest, alongside Jeff Smith and Jules Feiffer, a few years back. How did that come about?

CD: Well, every year the Japanese picked a few creators to come over and see Japan. You had to be recommended by creators who had already been and the Japanese hosts had to review your resume and portfolio. I was really thrilled to get picked. I am always pleased when I achieve something based solely on the quality of my work.

BL: What do you think of the differences and similarities of the US and Japanese comics industries?

CD: The industries have so little in common we might as well be on different planets. The Japanese comic market is huge. It is all about moving huge numbers of very cheaply produced weekly magazines, none of which are meant to be collected.

The American market is much closer to the European market. The growing emphasis on graphic novel sales and the shrinking comicbook sales are in direct opposition to the focus of the Japanese market.

We have a lot of goofy misconceptions about the Japanese market and how the creators live and

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work. The emphasis in Japan is all about volume. Most creators have a big team of assistants. It's all a studio system really. In America, creators and publishers are vilified for using work for hire and assistants. They really don't care about that in Japan. There is a famous artist figurehead at the studio, but the rest of the studio does a lot of the work. We were told that one prominent artist draws nothing but the eyes of her figures, though other artists maintain as much of the primary creative work for themselves as they can. Of course, my fans would hang me if they thought I had a team of ghost artists! No one would care in Japan. There isn't as much creative freedom as one would think either. There is a lot of pressure from the publishers. Some of the artists we met were very curious about self-publishing.

We also tend to believe all the artists in Japan are rich and famous. They may be more famous than we are, but rich is a relative term. $1,000,000 sounds like a lot of money, but it doesn't go far in Tokyo. My condo would be a millionaire's home. One artist joked that she would like to come to America and be my housekeeper! Though she was a lot more famous than me, she didn't have my quality of life. They all thought I was rich because I was wearing some famous designer clothes which would have cost me a fortune in the Ginza!

I think all American artists would want the kind of recognition for our work that Japanese artists have, but the Japanese artists would love to have the kind of freedom and lifestyle that even moderately successful American artists have. I'm glad I went. It got me over some of my dewy-eyed notions, I can tell you! A lot of Western manga fans still have the weirdest ideas about the manga industry, but I just sort of shake my head and ignore them now. Either they will get over their daydreams or they won't. It's not all about being rich and famous, that's for sure. It's backbreaking work and the reward is not nearly as great as one might think. Of course, plenty of American fans think the same thing about American artists! We're not all rich like Todd MacFarlane!

BL: Despite stylistic similarities to manga art, your artwork is fairly unique and there are no real discernible influences from other artists. Were you influenced at all by any other artists, or did you have any real favourites?

CD: Well, I didn't have much access to comics as a very young girl. We couldn't afford them. If I wanted a comic book, I got someone's cast-offs or I dug through the trash so I could redeem coke bottles to buy them. When my family moved out of the city, there was no place that sold comics. I read the ones I owned until they fell apart.

My biggest early influence was **Prince Valiant**. I clipped the strips out of the newspaper and saved them like they were the rarest and most precious thing you could imagine. There were some hardcover **Prince Valiant** storybooks you could buy and I saved my money to get them. I still have them. The oldest is dated 1976. I think it is probably the first book I ever bought. It is a mess, but it was my treasure.

I loved illustrators like Howard Pyle. I loved Disney movies, especially *Sleeping Beauty*. My parents bought me a big hardcover book about Disney movies when I was a kid. It was very expensive and we were very poor. I knew it was a big sacrifice for my mom and dad to buy me that book. They were looking down and beaming at me as I read it. I remember that. That's a bright memory! I spent all this time stretched out on my bed reading that book and looking at the pictures and my mom and dad would just peek in the door and smile at me!

My mom had won one of those Famous Artists Course things when she was a girl and I spent a great deal of time with those books, drawing and studying. I still have them.

I loved storybooks. Illustrators like William Crane, Tasha Tudor, the Pre-Raphaelites. I was so rude at the library. I would check out books and hold on to them forever. I had ghastly late fees.

BL: Following up on the previous question, did you have any favourite characters or series? Any favourites today you'd like to work on, or creators you'd like to collaborate with?

CD: Well, I loved **Aquaman**. I remember Nick Cardy's work from very early on. I watched the show as a kid and I had a big crush on Aquaman. **A Distant Soil** came about because I had the hots for the King of the Seas. I created this psionic cutie to be his sidekick in complete defiance of the fact that he had a wife. Over the years, that character became Liana, the lead in **A Distant Soil**. It's a long, goofy story, but it's true.

I really liked the **Teen Titans** and **The Legion of Super-Heroes**. I didn't start reading **The X-Men** until I was older. I loved those Claremont/Byrne/Austin books. They were choice! The first issue I read was Jean Grey's funeral!

I would love to draw the Legion again and if DC would give me a crack at it, I would kick butt on **Batman**! I'd like to try Aquaman someday, and the X-Men of course!

*BL: Your work hits the comic stand infrequently at times, but you always seem to be busy with paintings, sketches for remarqued **A Distant Soil** collections, outside projects, and so on. Do you find time to draw for relaxation, or do you relax by doing other things?*

CD: I haven't been relaxed in years. I worked for nine months last year without a day off. I just got off a three-month stint this spring.

I jog or walk every day and I do some fiddling in my garden.

I haven't had any relaxed drawing time in awhile, but any time I am not under a real deadline crunch, drawing is relaxing anyway. I truly enjoy it.

BL: You also seem to be closely involved with a lot of other artistic fields, such as science fiction and fantasy for instance. Are those general interests of yours or merely more diverse outlets for your work?

CD: I enjoy SF and fantasy very much. I was a serious collector for many years, but have started to be more selective about my buying habits. I have to get a new house eventually, if for no other reason than just to house all my books!

BL: Generally, your fans seem very positive and open-minded but you have

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had a few people fly off the handle at you in their correspondence, not to mention some more disturbing experiences. How does that affect your view of your fans?

CD: I will be honest with you: I had a very negative view of fans for many years. I was a very negative person overall for a long time. Between the ugly **A Distant Soil** lawsuits with WaRP and being stalked and having more than my fair share of perverts grabbing me or stealing my clothes or showing up at my house, I was just so darned shell-shocked and paranoid I couldn't get through the day without getting angry. I mean, the first perv letter I got was from some creep writing me that he wanted my underwear because he had seen my letter in **Super Friends**, for God's sake! I was in elementary school, I think. It was very scary. At one show, someone went through my luggage and stole all that underwear. That was a few years back. I was very defensive and always on the lookout for an attack. It made me hard to get along with. I tried everything to control the problem, like not wearing makeup and dressing dowdy but all that did was make me unhappy!

Finally, I began to realise that if I didn't get a hold of the way I was reacting to the problems, the problems were just going to take over my whole life.

Some years ago, I decided I needed a break.

First off, I distanced myself from everyone I knew and took stock. I went to some motivational seminars, tried some different techniques for self-improvement. I even did the famous Tony Robbins firewalk! I was having a lot of trouble working and knew that it was because I was letting negative things get to me. Drawing was difficult and painful. I was determined to do whatever it took to get my love of drawing back. That included walking through fire, which I did.

The second thing I did was I decided to dump every negative person in my life I could find. I went through my rolodex and threw out half the names. If the person was a bad influence, out they went. I didn't care how famous or important they were. I only wanted real friends. Some pretty luminous names went into the trash, I can tell you.

The third thing I did was I decided to stop putting myself third or fourth or fifth. I stopped making decisions about what was best for other people all the time. I figured it was time to do what was best for me for a change. I learned to say no for the first time. I learned not to feel guilty about it.

I dropped out of the professional community for a while and spent more time with my real friends and family. That cleaned out my head. I came back to the world fairly recently and I feel much better. Like a million bucks! My work is better, my professional relationships are better, my way of dealing with difficult people and situations is much better. I realise that just because one fan is a creep, it is unfair to all the other fans to let that person ruin my mood at a show. It is unfair to everyone to let that affect my work. It is especially unfair to me. These people don't get more than a minute of my ire now. I learned a great lesson: "20% on the problem, 80% on the solution." I get 20% of the time I devote to any disturbance to get all emotional about it and let off steam. After that, it's not allowed. I have to spend the rest of the time dealing with solving the problem. In the case of a creep at a show, it is easy to let it go now. In the past, it would have ruined my day. Most of the fans are so cool, so nice. How lousy is it to let just one spoil it for everyone?

I take stock of my life every time and very carefully weigh the positives and negatives of everything and everyone in it. I still weed out the rolodex. Life is short. I want a good one. I don't have to carry bad luggage.

BL: For somebody who has had so varied a career, do you have any goals or ambitions?

CD: Well, I would really like to finish **A Distant Soil** and do it in a way that makes me proud. I don't want to have to look at it and be ashamed of it, or turn it into a cash cow, or feel that I have wasted my time. I look at some of these other creators and see how they have turned their cherished works into money factories, producing sad imitations of the original creations. I think that would be a nightmare. I am not happy with an issue of **A Distant Soil** unless I can honestly say that it is an improvement over the previous one. I just want to do a good job.

I want other people to look at my work the same way I looked at comics and illustrations when I was a little girl. When you see something you love, you feel pulled into it. If I can give other people that wonderful sensation, if I can turn fifty or sixty and be some little old lady at a con having girls come up to me saying, "You made me want to be a comics artist!", I think I would love that!

I would very much hope that I have managed my career well enough that I could provide for a comfortable old age. I want to be in demand as an artist when I am 90! But I want to work because I want to, not because I am compelled to by poverty, as is the case with many of our senior artists, and that is a shame.

I don't know if I have any real ambitions other than I want to do a really good job, and to be able to make a living at it. That's all I ever wanted. I guess that's not very smart, but I don't see anything else in life worth having beyond the love of my family. **BL**

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THE BLANK PAGE

Andrew Cheverton claims Marvel is Galactus and Joe Quesada is the Silver Surfer... What do you think?

Wanted: One Ultimate Nullifer

JOE Quesada is devouring comic writers and he must be stopped. Oh, sit down and shut up at the back. Okay - how's this? Marvel Comics is Galactus and Quesada is the Silver Surfer. Happy now? Good grief…

What the hell was I about to say?

Oh, yes: Brian Michael Bendis.

Now, I like the little guy. I like his writing, his humour and his attitude. My life would certainly continue if he wasn't to draw another comic ever again, but that's just my opinion (actually, that's not quite true - I did like his cartoony art in **Fortune & Glory**). I like Bendis' ethics too. He publicly walked from a dream assignment on a best-selling Todd MacFarlane Productions comic, a comic about which he had previously said something like; "I'll stop writing it when you pry it from my cold, dead fingers". And if he walked because he had a problem with this upcoming Miracleman debacle, then I respect him all the more. And you should too.

But haven't we lost enough quality comic writers to superheroes already?

It may be fair to say that many of us are here because of superheroes. I know I am. But surely most of us are old enough and mature enough, hopefully even *discerning* enough, to want something a little more.

I like everything Bendis has written, from **A.K.A. Goldfish** to **Elektra**. He's quality, like Alan Moore without the beard and the madness. In fact, I think he may actually be incapable of bad writing; I've read **Hellspawn** and I know it *is* possible to polish a turd, whatever the older generation may tell you to the contrary. He may occasionally get saddled with some dodgy artists (his current Marvel schedule will bear this out) but his writing always shines through.

And yet; isn't there a point where you have to stop and wonder where all your favourite writers went?

Marvel Comics currently squats at the centre of the American industry like a vast whirlpool, dragging everyone to its core. The writers currently attracted to Marvel are seemingly from the Vertigo stable and the independent arena. They apparently like superheroes just as much as we do and, let's face it, the classic heroes of our generation are from the Marvel universe. But the whirlpool is getting bigger and stronger and it is pulling in writers as fast as it can. And I wonder if any of them will escape long enough to write anything other than Marvel comics again.

Brian Azzarello can multiply his reader base and his income by writing a Hulk mini-series. Garth Ennis can do the same, mostly so that his mate John McCrea gets to draw the Hulk and Spider-Man. Bendis has gone from crime and humour comics to solely writing superheroes. And they are by no means the only ones.

Issue one of Azzarello's **Banner** series rests at number 54 in the Diamond Previews Top 100 for July. It's not there because of the success of Azzarello or **100 Bullets**, but because it's the Hulk. In fact, it's right there next to **The Incredible Hulk # 30** at position 55.

Tangled Web: Severance Package lies at number 48. And you know it's not there because all the readers of **Whiteout** bought it. It's there because it's a Spider-Man comic. The fact that it is the lowest-selling Spider-Man title for that month (or that Spider-Man is, for all intents and purposes, not even in that issue) really only makes matters worse.

What incentive do these writers have for writing another **Preacher** or **100 Bullets**? Why should Bendis continue writing **Powers** when **Alias** - a Marvel comic based around exactly the same premise - is sure to outsell it? How many people who enjoyed Rucka's Tangled Web story will think to buy **Queen & Country**?

It's not as if the readers of these Marvel comics are going out and buying **Kabuki** and **Whiteout** and **100 Bullets**, because the numbers show that they're not. There's a fine line between writing for Marvel for the love and the money, and writing for Marvel in order to raise your profile. And that line gets more blurred the closer you get to the whirlpool.

I would find it easier to criticise Marvel if these comics were shite (and, once upon a time, not very long ago, almost all of Marvel's entire output *was* shite). Unfortunately, these new Marvel comics aren't. Most of the Marvel Knights and Ultimate lines are exceptionally good. The Spider-Man and X-Men lines are in the best shape they've been in for a good many years. These are all good comics. But for every new Marvel comic from an independent writer, there's one less independent comic being written.

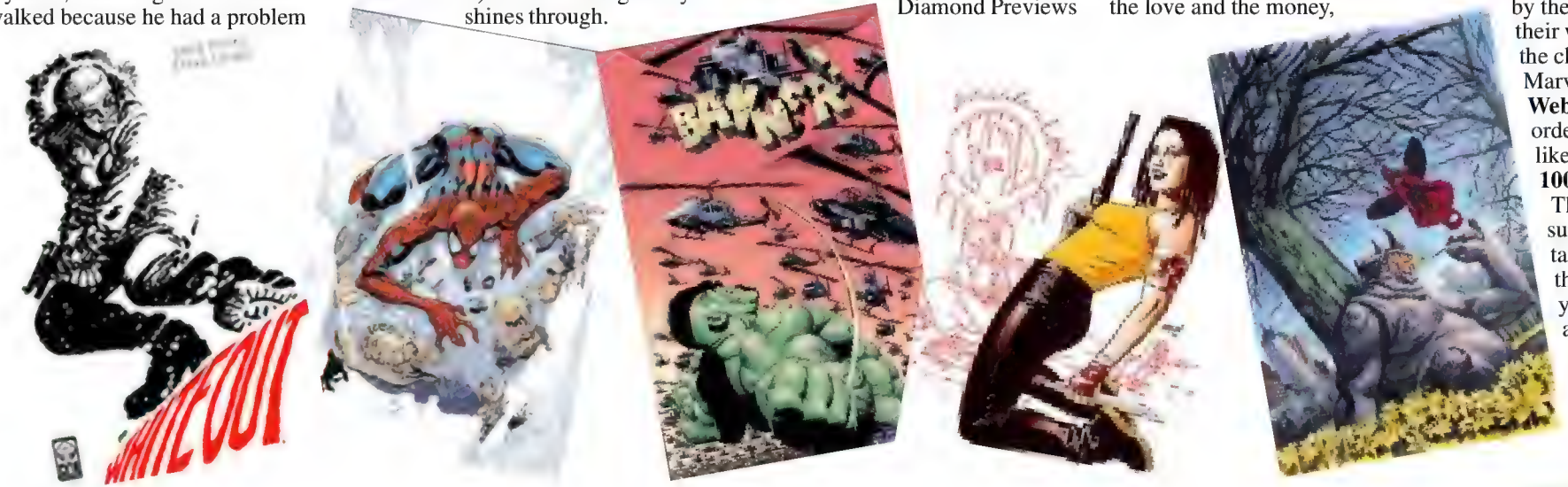
And without these independent comics, there's less diversity and less innovation. There's even less reason for a newcomer to the industry to pick up something that will interest them other than superheroes.

I'm not about to suggest that you boycott these comics. That would be hypocritical, because I'm buying most of them myself. But what you need to do is to seek out other work by these writers. Show them that their work is what matters, not the character that they wrote for Marvel. If you liked **Tangled Web: Severance Package**, order Top Cow's **Felon**. If you liked **Banner**, pick up Vertigo's **100 Bullets**.

There's more to comics than superheroes and it shouldn't take you much effort to find them for yourselves. Talk to your retailer. Get off your arses and do something.

Marvel is Galactus and Quesada is the Silver Surfer.

Don't say you weren't warned. BL



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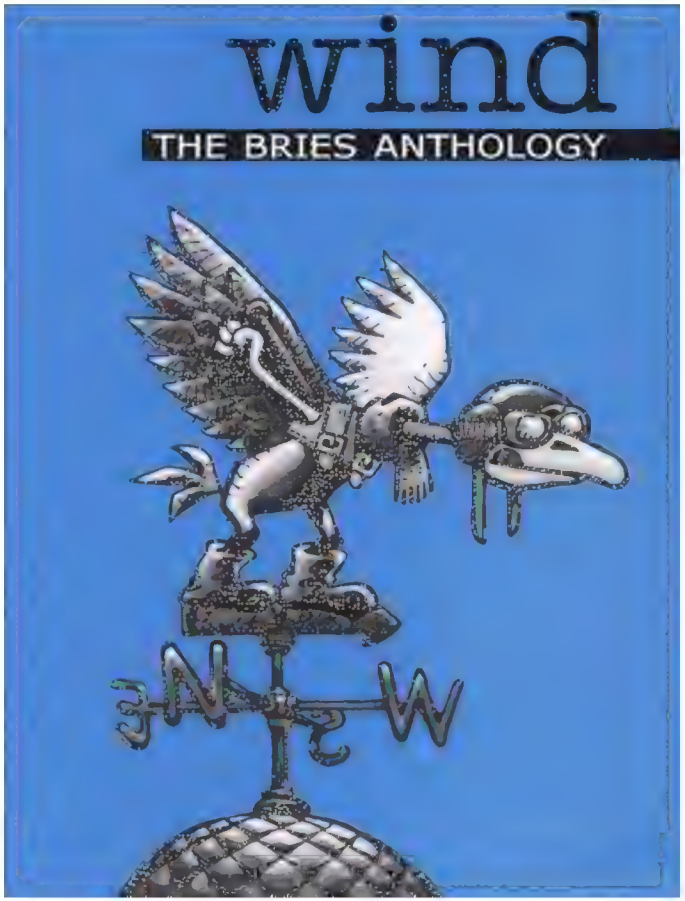

BRIES: A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

***Owen Erasmus** takes a look at the output of an innovative Belgian indy publisher and previews its latest projects*

ONE of the few growth areas for Anglophone comics fans right now seems to be a rise in interest in European comics and Japanese manga; possibly because they often provide a halfway house between the ubiquitous superheroes and the more arty fare like Chris Ware's **Jimmy Corrigan** or Dan Clowes' **David Boring**. While manga books have been the big commercial success of the broadening horizon, there are an increasing number of European comics being offered to the English speaking audience. Most of these have been translations, of course. Humanoids, Dark Horse, Drawn and Quarterly, NBM and Fantagraphics have during the last few years all offered a number of existing works translated into English.

One new publisher, Bries, has taken a slightly different approach. Despairing of the tiny audience for alternative comics in the Flemish speaking half of Belgium, Bries' founder Ria Schulpen made the brave decision of publishing her line of comics entirely in English. Although availability in the American and British comics market was a welcome side effect of this it doesn't seem to have been the driving force behind the decision. With Belgian, Dutch and Scandinavian alternative comics fans already doing much of their reading in English Bries feels it can reach readers in a variety of European countries, giving them a wider audience in continental Europe than publishing in Flemish could ever have done.

Bries has so far released four books in the direct, primarily American and British, market and has three more graphic novels coming in the next few months. The first batch showed their multi-national approach extremely clearly. The anthology **Wind** included artists from all over Europe and the USA. While Belgian artists were heavily represented there was also a place for stalwarts of the US small press scene like Tony Consiglio, Scott Roberts and Peter Sickman-Garner. Like most anthologies it was a little hit and miss, with the idea of basing stories around the idea of wind - Bries means Breeze - leading to a little repetition of plots. However, as a sampler of what is going on in the European small press it was excellent and a few artists really caught the eye. The foreword suggests that it was intended as a way for the reader to discover new talent and it certainly worked in that regard.

One of the best stories in **Wind** was a charming, wordless story by German artist Ulf K, whose **The Man on the Moon and Other Stories** graphic novel was another of Bries' initial releases. Ulf K had already been published in both French and German and has also appeared in the Canadian anthology **Spoutnik** and in the American book **Non,** alongside indy heavyweights like Paul Pope, James Kochalka and Jordan Crane. Schulpen admits that he is probably the best received of the Bries artists, being praised everywhere their books have been released. It's easy to see why. He specialises in short stories told in a style reminiscent of children's book

illustration; with very heavy black backgrounds and cute cartoony figures, there is a sweetness to his art that combines very well with the poetic, bittersweet stories. A second book, the longer **A Tango with Death**, is due before the end of the year. Having read the French edition solely to see more of his art I'm looking forward to

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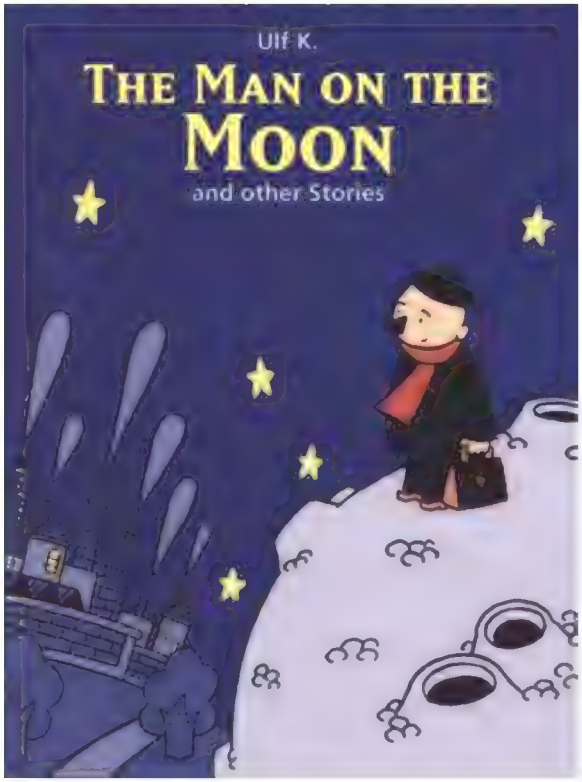
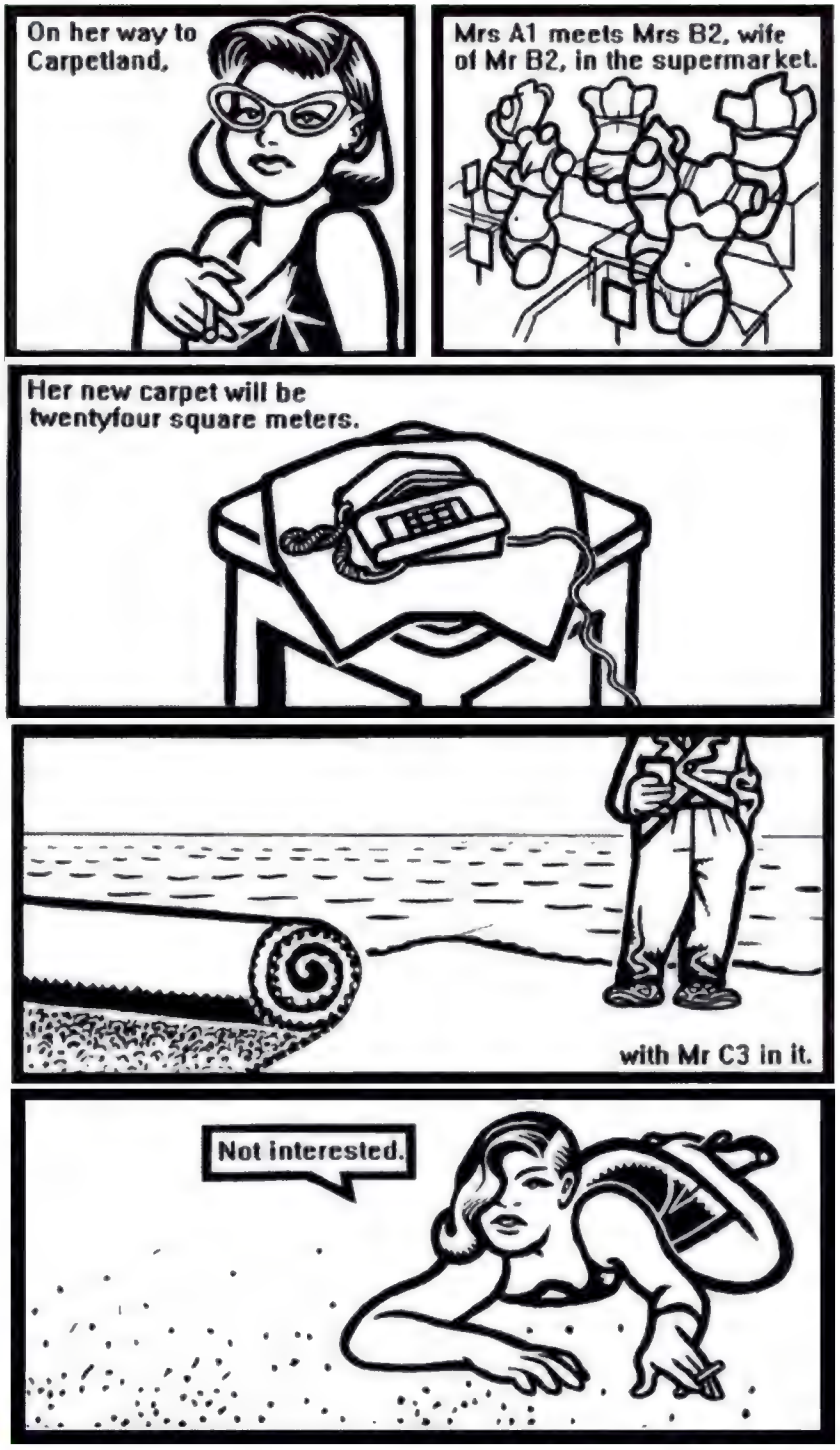
reading it in English and finding out just what was going on.

The other stand out release of the first batch was **Eiland 3** - the earlier issues of the series are unavailable in the UK - by Dutch creators Stefan Van Dinther and Tobias Schalken, a very impressive 64 page issue that looked more like an art magazine than a traditional comic. Its glossy covers, heavy pages and imaginative use of colour give the whole thing a highly designed feel similar to books like **Blab** or **Acme Novelty Library**. This aspect of the book has caused mixed reactions. *The Comics Journal* gave it the best review of the line and it has received good press in Europe, but the emphasis on experimentation over narrative means that it is less accessible than **The Man on the Moon** or **Wind**. Personally I found the artwork extremely inventive but thought it was still used in the service of storytelling, not just experimentation for its own sake. It isn't as off-puttingly experimental as some art comics but it does demand some involvement by the reader. It repays that involvement though, giving some real emotional pay off to several silent stories about relationships and showing a huge range of techniques, from collages and computer generated work to photos of plasticine models.

The next batch of books from Bries includes, as well as the aforementioned second Ulf K book, work by another German artist, Anke Feuchtenberger. Her **W the Whore** has already received rave *Comics Journal* reviews in its French and German incarnations. While that probably targets the artier end of the market, Belgian artist Philip Paquet's biography of Louis Armstrong looks set to be more accessible. Paquet's work in **Wind** also dealt with music and night life and he has a real knack for evoking a vibrant mood with his artwork. Comics dealing with music are hard to pull off; Steven Lafler's **Bughouse** from Top Shelf also tried to deal with jazz but had to resort to an exaggerated funny animal style that didn't entirely work. I think Paquet's more realistic but very emotive style suits the subject. His earlier work has captured the mood of listening to live music rather than actually struggling to try and show the music itself, and I'm sure the Armstrong book will do the same.

Given the subject matter and styles of Bries' comics, it is unlikely to ever challenge superhero publishers for sales in the British or American market - but it is a welcome addition to the indy sector. Most of the European translations from other publishers are, by necessity, of highly commercial material like erotica, sci-fi or fantasy graphic novels. The output of Europe's more adventurous artists is rarely seen in English, leaving enthusiasts to pore over half understood foreign editions. By translating people like Ulf K and Anke Feuchtenberger and by producing its own Belgian comics, Bries is letting English speaking readers get a better idea of what is going on in European comics. The positive response to most of its books shows that this is more than just an educational experience; Ulf K in particular looks likely to become a fairly well known name in alternative comics and is the closest thing Bries has to a star artist. However, I have enjoyed its other books almost as much and I anticipate the next wave of them meeting with a similarly positive response. **BL**




On her way to Carpetland.
Mrs A1 meets Mrs B2, wife of Mr B2, in the supermarket.
Her new carpet will be twentyfour square meters.
with Mr C3 in it.
Not interested.

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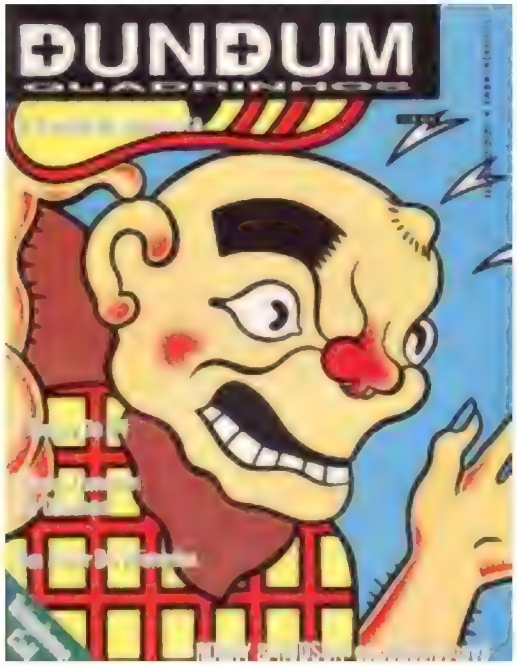
World Comics

Paul Gravett explores a world where comics are not derided – our world!

COMICS READERS: A PANORAMA

VENICE International Airport. A sharply-dressed businessman in his fifties is picking up some essential reading material for his flight – a quality broadsheet newspaper, the latest issues of *Fortune*, *The Economist* and a copy of **Tex**, the world's best-selling cowboy comic. What better way to wind down from all that high finance and wheeler-dealing than to travel back to the Wild West?

The heart of Paris. Teenage kids flock to the Tonkam store to snap up the coolest comics and animation videos from Japan. Not for them Asterix and Tintin, their parents' favourites; they prefer **Dragon Ball Z**, **Angel** and **Sailor Moon**. They'll happily buy the original untranslated imports, and then alongside the pictures they use the 'rubi' or pronunciation keys next to all the difficult 'kanji' characters to decipher the stories, learning Japanese in the process.



South Africa. The townships outside Johannesburg. The Storyteller Group distribute their free sponsored educational comics on everything from AIDS prevention to guides to investigating and reconciling wrongs perpetrated under apartheid, and adaptations of South African folklore, reclaiming their people's legends forgotten by a generation.

Sotheby's auction house, New York. Some of the rarest American comic books come under the hammer and well-heeled dealers and connoisseurs send prices soaring to new records. What once cost a mere ten cents back in the thirties and forties can top $50,000 or more today. Like fine antiques, condition is everything and some of these readers will actually never read their investments, double-bagging and slabbing them in Mylar plastic and stashing them in a safe deposit box.

From just these examples, it should be clear that it is hard to generalise about the typical comic reader. The audiences for comics around the world are as diverse as their formats, contents and intentions. Over the years, moral guardians and cultural elitists commonly dismissed comics as, at best, escapist trash for the young and poorly educated or, at worst, as dangerously subversive primers for juvenile delinquents and sexual deviants. Their tarnished reputation in Europe and America, due especially to the unbridled American horror and crime comic books of the late forties and early fifties, persists. A french survey from the nineties found that half of those who have never read comics still think that they have a corrupting influence.

Teachers and librarians had been among the campaigners against comics, so there is some irony in the fact that today some of them keenly endorse them as a way to stimulate youngsters who have given up books for videos and computer games and to get them to read at least something. Historically,

comics were invented by a boarding-school teacher, one Rodolphe Töpffer (1799-1846) in Geneva, Switzerland. The first comic readers of his **L'Histoire de M. Vieux-Bois** (translated as **The Adventures of Mr. Obadiah Oldbuck**) were Töpffer's own young students, and the first comic fan was none other than German genius Goethe, whose enthusiastic reaction spurred Töpffer to create further 'histoires en estampes', translated and imitated across Europe and in America.

From Töpffer's lead comics as a truly mass medium – and an international one aggressively exported by syndicates – blossomed in the Sunday colour supplements which came free with American big-city newspapers from the 1890's. **The Yellow Kid**, **The Katzenjammer Kids**, **Buster Brown** and more proved to be hugely successful circulation boosters, with broad appeal to immigrant urban populations, often still grasping the English language. The Sunday 'funnies', as they were affectionately called, are still much loved today in the States. A 1993 Belden Study, commissioned by Metropolitan Sunday Newspapers, found that 86,323,000 adults – roughly a third of the population – had read the comic strip section in the previous four weeks. Three quarters of these said that reading comics is a good way to start people reading the newspaper, and 87 per cent agreed that comics can help children to read. Of children aged eight to 17, 75 per cent of boys and 71 per cent of girls had read the Sunday comics in the last four weeks.

As a mass medium and entertainment industry, the American comic book has not weathered nearly so well. During and after World War II, circulations could top one million. The seminal crime title – Lev Gleason's **Crime Does Not Pay** – claimed 6 million readers (allowing for copies passed along). A demographic survey by Edward Feder of the U.C. Berkeley Bureau of Public Administration in the late forties, based on users of the San Joaquin County Library, found that in the eight to 14 age range, 96.5 per cent of boys and 94.7 per cent of girls read comic books. Of adults aged 21 to 30, 42.9 per cent of men and 51 per cent of women read comic books. From the fifties, more and more readers switched over to television and gave up buying comic books from newsstands and drugstores. This decline seemed unstoppable and by the early seventies some were forecasting the death of the comic book.

It was only saved by selling comics on a 'firm sale' basis, with no risk of unsold, unresellable copies being returned, supplying them instead to specialist distributors who serviced a growing network of comic book shops. This meant catering to the tastes of the committed fan and collector, typically a young male with a preference for superheroes. A quarter of a century on, after booms and busts fuelled by speculation and greed, only a handful of the best-selling American comic books approach 100,000 copies a month. Some media events can still create an occasional best-seller, notably the (short-term) death of Superman or the Hollywood blockbusters. But from their peak, less than half of the stores remain, ordering from only one surviving major distributor.

Comics should be for everybody and

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around the world they are. A wide range of subjects for both sexes and all age groups has proved to be a key to Japan's extraordinary manga market – one of the two biggest in the world. Out of the total volume of sales of all books and magazines surveyed in March 1996, a staggering 40 per cent were manga – representing $6-7billion, an annual expenditure of over $50 for every person in Japan. Throughout Japan's current recession, manga have maintained their popularity, adding new niche titles about everything from hard-nosed economics to advice for first-time mothers and successfully exported across Asia, Europe and the States.

The other huge consumer of comics is Mexico. While more recent figures are hard to come by, in the late seventies comics were the country's second leading mass medium after radio, with television still a distant third. Some 26 firms published low-priced comics books with monthly print runs ranging from 280,000 to 8.4 million copies. These figures fail to show the numbers of readers of each copy reached, as it was passed along to family and friends, sold second-hand, rented out or provided in barber ships or at juice stalls. In addition they were read out loud and

ÉXTASIS
NOVELAS CON AMOR
AMOR SOLO AMOR
CADA NOVELA TE LLEVARÁ AL ÉXTASIS
YA ESTÁ A LA VENTA
EL EROTISMO EN MANOS DE LOS MEJORES ESPECIALISTAS DEL MUNDO

performed in some towns with literacy problems.

Relatively high illiteracy levels can only partly account for Mexicans' passion for comics. For example, masked wrestling heroes liked El Santo and SuperBario have become the people's champions, played by real-life prizefighters. Comics are populist, disposable and unpretentious, enjoyed by Mexicans of all ages and walks of life.

In contrast, following the almost complete disappearance of cheaper bande dessinée (BD) magazines, the Francophone market has become focussed on the higher-priced hardback album format, a gift book for children or an art book for adults. A 1994 survey by the Angoulême International Comics Festival found that the typical French BD reader is a young man aged 15 to 34, educated, city-dwelling, who buys less than 10 albums a year but reads more than four every month – evidently borrowing them from friends. But comics are read by all ages in France. Not surprisingly, it was found that nearly all youngsters aged eight to 14 – around 92 per cent – read comics and while the percentages drop as the age groups get older, as many as 38 per cent of 35-49 year olds read BD albums. Interestingly, 60 per cent of the largest consumers of 'proper' books – those who buy 25 or more a year – were also BD readers.

Elsewhere in Europe, readers tend to choose less luxurious formats than the French and Belgians. The Dutch, Flemish and Germans, for example, prefer softcover albums, sold in huge numbers from newspaper kiosks. Half a million Italians – young and old – enjoy heroes like the cowboy **Tex** and supernatural investigator **Dylan Dog** in complete 100-page paperback-size fumetti, while the Italian Mickey Mouse comic – **Topolino** – sells over 400,000 copies. In Scandinavia, Disney comics, especially the ducks of Carl Barks, have become timeless classics, read and re-read by generations. In Finland, Donald Duck can sell 300,000 copies to a population of only five million. Then there are the peculiar local successes that often fail to cross over to other countries, such as **Suske en Wiske** albums by Willy Vandersteen, the Breughel of comics, which have sold over five million copies in Flemish, or the rude, crude **Viz**, which once topped 1.5 million readers in Britain, making it the second biggest selling periodical in the country.

So next time you pick up a comic to read, pause for a moment and listen. All across the planet, millions are doing just the same as you, reading tebeos in Spain, quadrinhos or gibis in Brazil, beeldverhaalen in The Netherlands, lianhuanhua in China, manga and gekiga in Japan, komiks in the Philippines and Indonesia, historietas in Argentina, sarja in Finland, fumetti in Italy, banda desenhada in Portugal, benzii desenate in Romania. In India people can follow the whole Mahabharata adapted in *Classics Illustrated* style. In Egypt, Mickey Mouse and Beryl the Peril jostle the comics' pages alongside new homegrown children's favourites. The collapse of Soviet power has finally ushered in a struggling but distinct comics renaissance in Russia. The medium is everywhere.

Beyond nation states, the Internet is our new shared global territory and comics are evolving new paperless formats. Comics creators anywhere in the world are designing their work online and reaching consumers directly, freed from almost all of the middlemen – the publishers, printers, distributors, retailers and perhaps the censors. The potential readership for comics

within this new virtual environment is as limitless as the millions of computer users worldwide. Nokia have been supporting wacky minimalist text-message comics circulated via mobile phones, while in Japan Adobe's new electronic book player is being promoted as a new way to read full-colour manga. It seems safe to say that, as long as we humans possess that primal appetite for visual stories about our real and imagined selves, the world will be reading comics, or whatever comics continue to evolve into.

© Paul Gravett 1996 and 2001 **BL**

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PART OF THE ESTABLISHMENT?

***Adrian Brown** talks to Charlie Adlard about his work, his comics and his plans for the future...*

*THE first place where most people outside the UK saw the work of Charlie Adlard was in **The X Files** series published by Topps. Clear, dynamic storytelling with the same ambience as the TV series was apparently not enough for the people from the "other" X-Franchise, and the series came to an end shortly after Charlie left.*

*But there is much more of interest in Charlie's back catalogue, ranging from appearances in **2000AD** and Marvel UK's Frontier imprint (Dances with Demons) via small press work like **White Death**, **Astronauts in Trouble** (part of Live from the Moon, all of Space 1959) to the recent **X Men: Hellfire Club** and **Batman: Scarface - A Psychodrama**. There is also a long list of work on different characters for different publishers, which all seems to come about because of Charlie's reputation as a hardworking and speedy artist.*

*Charlie is about to enter the monthly comics game with his collaboration with Ian Edginton on **The Establishment** from Wildstorm. **Borderline's Ade Brown** asked Charlie about some of the highlights of his diverse career so far, and took an advance look at the new series.*

BL: I've listed some of my favourites, what other projects you've worked on are you proud of?

CA: **Mars Attacks**. I cringe at the artwork in places, but Keith Giffen wrote a nice story. And it was my first mainstream ongoing work in the US, and of course got me **The X Files**. **The Crow** was also a good story, and one of the first occasions I'd experimented with different equipment. Personally, I think I did some good work on *The Storms*.

*BL: With all your other projects and those of Larry Young, will there be time for more **Astronauts in Trouble** tales?*

CA: I hope so ! We were talking at San Diego, and would definitely like to do it somehow. But whether I'm being published by him or collaborating with him on a story, I really want to continue to work with him.

BL: Which characters would you really like to work on?

CA: Dr Doom! *(Charlie has a well-documented interest in working on his favourite character, even nominating Doom as his comics "hero".)* But I am very happy to have created a series of characters in **The Establishment**. Even though it's not creator-owned, Ian and I can look at **The Establishment** and say "we made those characters".

*BL: What did you learn from self-publishing and from LCD (Les Cartoonists Dangereux, the British indie cooperative Adlard had a hand in establishing, and which published his and Robbie Morrison's **White Death**)?*

CA: I learned that I am not a publisher. LCD closed shop, not because it was not doing well, but because no-one was working on it full time because of our own projects. Brad! was editor-in-chief, and by working on each other's books we learned about different aspects of the business. My main aim was to get our book out, but I got much more.

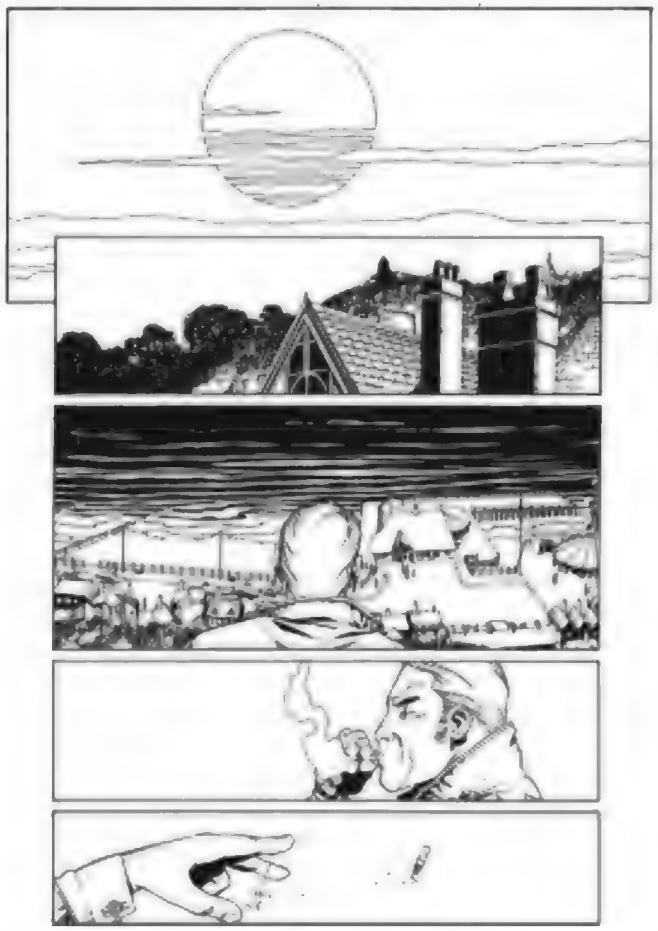
*BL: The aim of LCD was to work more in the European format, something which seemed to have backfired when the French language version of **White Death** quickly outsold the English one. Will the PlanetLar repackaging of **White Death** be in the same European album format?*

CA: It will probably be in the smaller American format, which will hopefully help it sell better in the current market. There will be three extra pages which were used to promote the book in France when it was launched. It might be released in December, which, with the snow in it, would make it an ideal present for Christmas. The French translation was very successful, and I am a big European comics fan, having been to Angoulême numerous times.

BL: What artists would you say are influences on you?

CA: So many, especially Hugo Pratt, Baru, De Crecy. Some of their work is available in translations, but I have shelves of European albums that I cannot read but I have because I love the art so much.

BL: Codeflesh *is one of two projects you have at the moment, a six-part collaboration with Joe Casey for Image as part of their **Double Image** anthology. I got the impression*



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from recent news of the series moving to Funk-O-Tron that it would be an ongoing series. What are the plans for it? Will it be collected?

CA: We will finish issue five with Image, and then do three issues with Funk-O-Tron. These will then be collected, perhaps in two volumes. If it gets more interest, we may do more.

BL: What are your thoughts on the different art style you used?

CA: It wasn't so much a different style as using different equipment which changes the appearance. Most of my mainstream work uses pencils and pens. I'd used charcoal with **White Death**. With *Codeflesh* I used a brush and the result was more expressionist. I'd been looking at Tommy Lee Edwards's work on **Disavowed** and J.P. Leon's work. The end result came out more like Paul Pope. It works well for "mature" work, although I am reluctant to use that term.

*BL: Your big breakthrough in the current comics scene is **The Establishment**, set in the **Authority** end of the Wildstorm universe. How did you come to be working on this project?*

CA: The call came totally out of the blue. Ian was always the writer, Wildstorm checked out some artists, and I was able to do it and keen to work with Ian. We've known each other for years, and we live close to each other in the Midlands.

BL: What attracted you to the book?

CA: It's different from what I'm associated with, and dissociates me from stuff like **The X Files**. I was interested in any proposal that was not just in the **X Files** style. The concept intrigued me because it allows for a wide, outlandish imagination while still being grounded in the normal. The series is visually very exciting for me to draw.

*BL: **The Establishment** features a British organisation which might be said to be a cross between* The Avengers *(Steed & Mrs. Peel) and **The Avengers** (of the Marvel Universe). Will the book retain its Britishness (something restricted to one or two characters in other Wildstorm books)?*

CA: We hope to avoid caricatures saying "bleedin'" and being anti-heroes for the sake of coolness. The next year's issues are set in the UK... well, except for visiting other dimensions. Where scenes are set in Britain I have tried to use real British locations, even if places are not named. And when a spaceship lands in Hyde Park, I want it to look right rather than the vague "British location" of many US comics.

BL: How do you collaborate with Ian, full scripts or rough story outlines?

CA: Ian works with a full script, which I prefer because, although working from a plot can speed things up, I feel it actually gives me more freedom to have a full script. Living so close to Ian, we do talk in between.

BL: You have designed the characters, what influences would you say you have called upon?

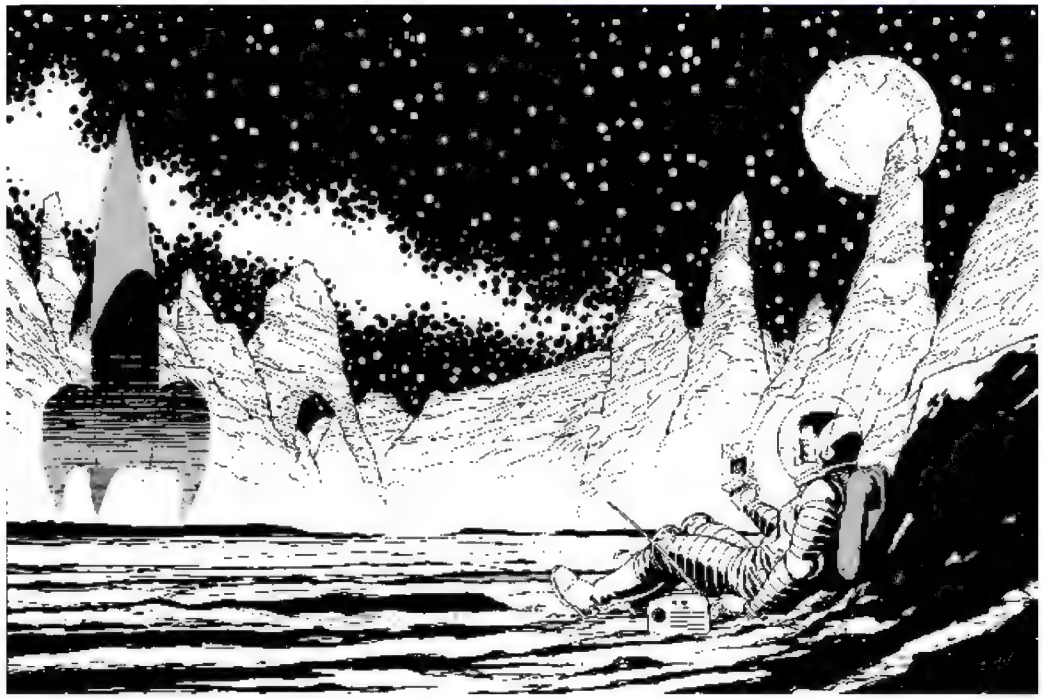
CA: Well, Ian's initial descriptions did not emphasise costumes for most of the characters, which allows us to move away from "classic" superhero fare. The characters can be more subtle. They can walk down the street. There really is a Sixties British TV Kitsch feel - polo necks and drainpipe trousers.

BL: Are there any teasers you can give us?

CA: The next arc will see the return, after fifty years of space travel, of one of the greatest heroes of the Wildstorm Universe.

*Finally, a story about Charlie that nicely illustrates his enthusiasm and his humour. Sketching at conventions can be a laborious task. When asked to draw convention sketches from **The X Files**, he says he would often draw a shadowy hand smoking a cigarette. At Bristol's Comics 2001 convention, Charlie was drawing his own comics "hero" - Doctor Doom. A small boy nervously asked him for a sketch, and Charlie, who was running late to meet someone, said "Who is your favourite character?". The youngster thought hard and said "Pikachu," which caused a loud laugh and a few questions about what Pikachu looks like. Finally, the boy looked at Charlie who had his black marker pen poised over the blank page and said "He's yellow." Needless to say, Charlie completed the drawing!* **BL**

Guide to illustrations: Previous page – **White Death** (top, left), **Establishment** (bottom, right). This page – Doc Doom sketch (bottom, left), **Nobody** (top, left), **Astronauts in Trouble** (bottom, right)



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BURNING DOWN THE CURTAIN

Rich Johnston's controversial look behind the closed door of comics

CROSSGEN is that plucky little publisher that could. Emerging, seemingly from nowhere, with Marc Alessi's millions behind it, CrossGen seems like a company that learned the lessons of Tekno Comics. Its insistence that creators move to Florida and come to work like they would at any office, might be seen as offputting by many. But the likes of Bart Sears, Mark Waid, George Perez, Laura DePuy and more have made the jump. And with a percentage ownership, a good salary and a chance to work in genres other than superheroes, it can be a tempting prospect.

The company is distinct from the rest of the market in other ways – it's created a fantasy universe with individual self contained titles that link thematically into the whole. Its creation hasn't been too easy, though – especially when other publishers are taken into account.

When a freelancer takes on a comic book project, they usually sign a contract for a set period of time. If, during that time, the freelancer wishes to move on to something else, arrangements are usually made. If a good period of notice is given it's a painless affair; creative teams are switched around, a positive spin of the situation is given to the media and life goes on as normal. And since DC and Marvel have a non-poaching agreement between themselves, the status quo is pretty much maintained.

However, Joe Quesada's blatant breaches of this gentlemen's embargo have put DC in a difficult spot, as it loses creators and editors to the new Marvel regime. All bets are now off. And what makes it worse is that some little upstart of a company like CrossGen also manages to land some sought after talent.

I've been told that people who want to move to CrossGen from DC have not found their contract situation as flexible as before. A number of freelancers have been told that if they want to break their contract, even if they give plenty of notice, they have two choices. Finish the contract as agreed, or pay back all payments and the project will be started anew with another creator. Since many freelancers simply can't afford to pay those payments back, any financial incentive they might have had to move to CrossGen is wiped away.

However, it emerges that in such cases, CrossGen has been paying those debts for the freelancers in question. The point is that while the new contract attitude is perfectly legal, it is not 'usual practice' in the comics industry. And the result is that freelancers involved feel victimised by DC and see CrossGen as some shining white knight. Probably not the result intended by DC.

There also seems to be a heavy bias at DC editorial against CrossGen for the simple reason that CrossGen doesn't use editors. It hasn't got any, splitting those duties between traffic managers, the publisher and the creative team. So while creators can get a good deal moving to CrossGen there's no similar possibility for editors. And what if that idea caught on?

However, if you live by the sword... One fish CrossGen thought it had well and truly caught was Bryan Hitch. After two of the **JLA** team - Waid and DePuy - had been signed, what would be more natural than for the penciller to move too?

CrossGen wooed Bryan and invited him over for a few weeks. Indeed, I hear Bryan spent time drawing *JLA: Heaven's Ladder* while he was there. And at the end of the visiting period, he signed on. CrossGen paid him a large advance to cover his moving costs. I understand that shortly afterwards, Bryan changed his mind and told CrossGen that he couldn't move. CrossGen demanded the return of the advance, plus interest, plus legal fees within a month. For Bryan, this wasn't an option.

Alessi vs Quesada?

It was around this time that he was offered the *Ultimate Avengers* project with Mark Millar, later to evolve into **The Ultimates**. And so, in a move familiar to CrossGen, Marvel paid Bryan's debts. But then CrossGen invoked a ninety day clause in the contract, preventing Bryan from working for a competitor for three months. So that had to be sorted out too.

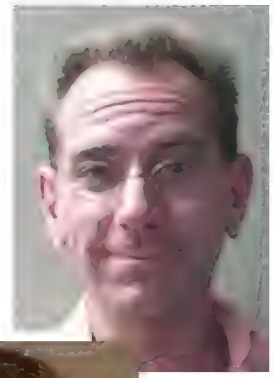
If CrossGen can't get Bryan Hitch... well, at San Diego Marc Alessi was wooing Alan Davis and used George Perez as a reference, who told Davis that CrossGen felt like home. While he was mulling it over, Alessi said, "Let's see how Quesada likes this!" Alessi was heard to tell fans in line for Scot Eaton that he was headed to a meeting with Quesada where he would "smack him around." He implied that the meeting would focus on Marvel's very public and very recent shenanigans and antics - those criticized in the cartoon which runs as part of CrossGen's regular ad in the freebie *Comic Shop News*. When asked if this was a panel, Alessi replied, "I wanted it to be a panel and have it filmed and everything. But Joe wouldn't let me do that."

With the powder keg lit, it was only a short time until the explosion.

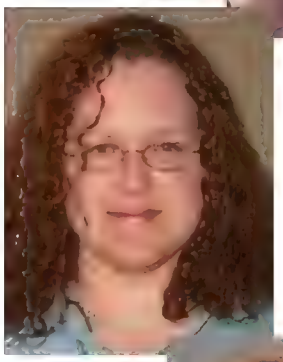
Of late, the CrossGen cartoon had been launching attacks on other publishers and creators in a jokey manner. After one particular ad ran slamming Top Cow's Matt Hawkins, his friend Joe Quesada threatened to remove all Marvel content given to CSN if they didn't stop running the ad. This occurred, it seems, after weeks of arguing between Alessi and Quesada. CrossGen and CSN relented, but made it clear that they had independently decided to stop running the cartoon and Quesada had nothing to do with it. However, Alessi did write a letter of apology to Matt Hawkins.

Either way, in terms of publicity and creator coups, CrossGen is batting above its weight. But when other companies fight back, it isn't so happy. And while staff join in the jokes about CrossGen being a cult with its leader Marc Alessi brainwashing them into joining, apparently Alessi doesn't get the joke. So be careful not to comment on the encampment of hundreds of FBI agents outside the compound, enquire just how flammable the Bristol board is or how long it would take for CrossGen to go up in flames, and definitely don't ask about the Kool Aid.

And watch for those with the CrossGen sigil tattoo... they're a growing number... join them, join them, join them... BL



Bart Sears



Laura DePuy

Mark Waid

George Perez

Rich Johnston writes the rumour column *All The Rage* at *http://www.silverbulletcomicbooks.com*

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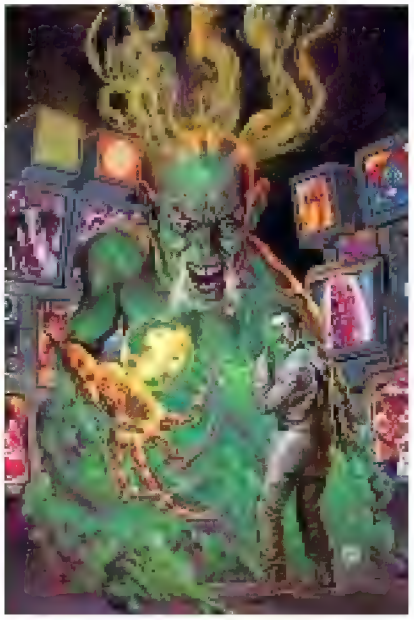
ISSUES

Carol Close has many of them

IT might seem strange to some but I tend to treat my favourite comics in exactly the same way as I treat my favourite football teams or favourite bands. I support them, I cheer them on, I want them to be successful and spend, well, at least several minutes every month poring over sales figures and chart positions to see how well they're performing. I'm not sure why exactly I bother doing this, as it always ends up depressing the hell out of me. Do you know that Jamie Delano's excellent but complex **Outlaw Nation** sold just 10,700 copies of its latest issue and could well have been cancelled by the time you read this? Even more perplexing is the fact that the critically acclaimed **Lucifer** and **American Century** sell less than 30,000 copies between them. And, while we're squishing about in Vertigo's guts, **Transmetropolitan**, **Hellblazer** and **100 Bullets** all sell well under 20,000 copies a month. That's less than **Supergirl**, **Titans**, **Robin** or even the revamped **Defenders**, a title recently dubbed the 'worst comic ever' by *Comics International*. In fact, if you add together the sales figures of all the Vertigo titles I've just mentioned the sum total still comes up short when compared to that of the execrable **X-Treme X-Men**.



You might say that Vertigo's titles are pitched at an older audience more likely to purchase them as collected editions, but that's an argument that runs out of gas pretty quickly, since big sellers such as **Green Arrow**, **Punisher** and **Elektra** are red hot certainties for the trade paperback treatment too. It's also true to say that the average age of comics fans in the UK and the States is mid-late 20s at least, meaning they're well within Vertigo's 'Suggested For Mature Readers' remit, and should therefore be more likely to buy adult-oriented titles than anything else. Some hope.

Unfortunately, I suspect that the comparative commercial failure of some of these titles is due purely and simply to a lack of sophistication on the part of most readers. For all the 'outsider cool' and 'geek chic' notions that comics fanboys like to foster, at the end of the day their tastes are just as populist, just as conservative, as those of people they'd probably deride for watching soaps, enjoying sports or reading Jeffrey Archer novels. When distanced from the superhero milieu it's as if they're out of their depth, unable to take on board stories, characters and ideas unless they feature mutants, Kryptonians or luridly coloured spandex of one kind or another.

The highest placed non-superhero book on August's top 300 list was J. Michael Stracynski's **Midnight Nation** at #39, with maybe another dozen titles featuring no obvious allusions to panties and capes making the top 100 (and some of those were *Star Wars* and *Tomb Raider* tie-ins). Is it any surprise then that Marvel's imminent adult-skewed MAX line is full of superhero-related books (**Alias**, **War Machine**, **Fury**, **Cage** and **Deathlok**)? Joe Quesada's no dummy - he knows that another superhero imprint with extra violence and added nudity is most male fans' idea of comics heaven. Perhaps if Agent Graves could fly, or if it was revealed that Story Johnson emitted laser beams from his eyes, their respective books might just get a sales spike.

***

I'm a libertarian kinda gal. You want to inject heroin into your eyeballs and gargle Domestos for kicks? Fine by me. You want to dress up as Barney, the purple dinosaur, and declare war on Liechtenstein? Go ahead, knock yourself out.

There are, however, some forms of behaviour so deviant that they test even my astonishing tolerance level to the max. Who, for example, is so twisted, so utterly soulless, clueless and demented that they'd willingly spend hundreds of their hard earned dollars or pounds on a full-size replica of Green Lantern's magic lamp? I only ask this question as Forbidden Planet's New Oxford Street branch currently has one of these bizarre items for sale – price £240. If that doesn't grab you, then how about hooking up to the FP website and splashing out on a statue of General Attar from the new *Planet Of The Apes* movie instead? It's a snip at £99.99.

The scary thing is that this stuff is sold as art. The aforementioned piece of General Attar-shaped metal is referred to as a 'statue' and its creators are even described as having 'sculpted' it. Indeed, there's a 'mini-bust' of **Weapon X** (£31.99) also featured on the

FP site, created by no less than three sculptors. Crikey, even Michelangelo's David could only boast one!

If this clamour for tat continues to escalate some enterprising soul is bound to hit on the idea of introducing a line of collector plates aimed at the seriously rich comics 'n' sci-fi saddo. You can just see the advertisement in the **News of the World**'s Sunday supplement now: "Punisher Kicking Ass (£10.99): this plate is the eighth in No Friends Collectibles' Psychotic Mercenaries Series, and shows the popular Marvel hero expertly utilising a blunt bayonet to disembowel a gang of lowlife scumbags. Created by the award-winning artist Steve Dillon, the artwork is fired onto fine china and surrounded by an elegant rich border of 23K gold. Elaborate plate stand included."

Don't laugh, Todd McFarlane's probably drawing up a business plan even as we speak. BL

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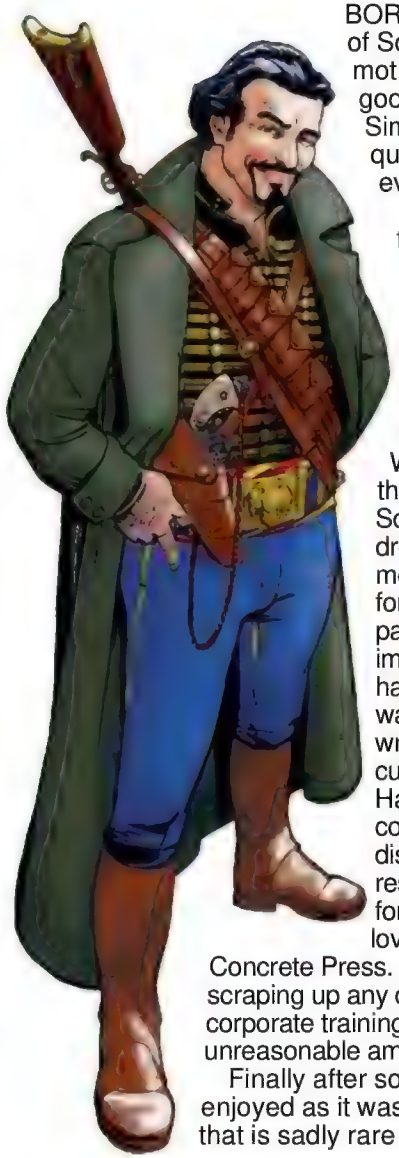
DRAWING BOARD

SECRETS FROM THE ARTIST'S PORTFOLIO

***Simon Fraser** takes us through his life and his sketchbook... from Inverness to Tanzania!*



BORN in Inverness and raised in various parts of Scotland and Canada. Simon Fraser's mother read in a childcare book that it was a good idea to encourage children to draw. Simon took the hint. Simon's mother has questioned her folly on numerous occasions ever since.

After a 3 year flirtation with the world of film and TV at art college and after, Simon decided that his only hope for true happiness rested with his first love, comics. The fact that there was no money in it was actually a good thing!

Simon's first published work was in a small press comic called **The Heaving Cube**, produced with friends at art college, and was designed to get right up people's noses. When you are 19 this seems like a really good idea. There then followed a relatively long association with the famous Scottish Small Press comic **Atomic** for which he wrote and drew **Thievery for Fun & Profit**, a 52 page pseudo-mediaeval heist story. Simon drew a couple of pieces for the short lived **Trident** imprint, for which he got paid for the first time, an experience he enjoys immensely, each and every wonderful time it happens. While trying to polish of his degree Simon was offered **Lux & Alby**, a 9 issue mini series written by Martin Millar and based on characters culled from his cult novels, published by Dick Hansom's Acme Press. The job took two years to complete for various reasons, but was widely distributed and gained some very good critical responses. Nine years later, after the project was all but forgotten, the story was finally collected together into one lovely volume and published by Pete Pavement's Slab-O-Concrete Press. Simon spent several years as a jobbing illustrator for hire, scraping up any comics work he could find in between illustrating tedious corporate training manuals. Not inspiring work, but Simon now knows an unreasonable amount about motivating his workforce.

Finally after some effort, he got work drawing **Roy of the Rovers**, which he really enjoyed as it was all about normal people interacting relatively normally, something that is sadly rare in comics. After watching an unreasonable amount of football as

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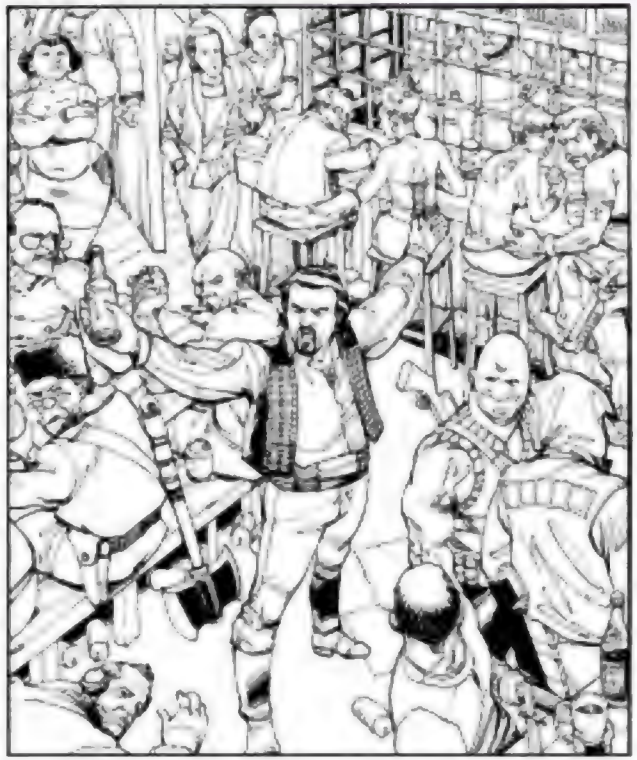
research, Simon now finds the game curiously compelling and it has been a convenient topic of discussion between blokes at awkward dinner parties ever since. After **Roy**'s cancellation Simon was taken on board at David Bishop's **Judge Dredd Megazine**, where he took over drawing *Shimura*, written by Robbie Morrison. Simon and Robbie have been working together almost continuously since then . As the Shimura *'Dragonfire'* story arc came to a conclusion, Robbie and Simon began discussing an idea for a new character that Robbie had. Something adventurous, sexy and fun. Something that would be a contrast to anything in **2000AD** at the time. *Nikolai Dante* sprang onto the scene in 1996 and quickly became a successful ongoing character, occasionally challenging Dredd for popularity.

Not long after Dante's debut, Simon got married and left the UK. A career drawing comics has the merit of being very portable and so far Mr Dante's exploits have been drawn in Italy, France, Austria and currently In northern Tanzania, where there are no comics shops. ***Simon Fraser talked to Phil Hall***



From Simon's Portfolio:
On the previous page: Nikolai Dante, plus the cover to the forthcoming ***Girly Comic.***
On this page: What Simon describes as "pure cheesecake – done for a friends birthday!"; A promo piece that Simon did on a project with Martin Miller, an illustration for an animated Robin Hood series, a page from the forthcoming Nikolai Dante story in ***2000AD,*** *and a promotional poster for a local fun run in Arusha, Northern Tanzania.*

BL

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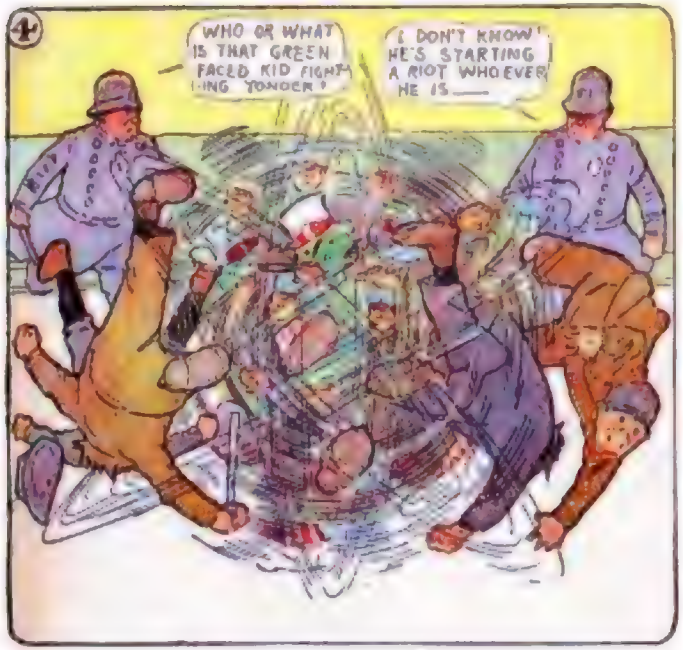
MILESTONES

Mike Kidson's look at the history of comics

NOT all milestones in the history of comics are old and moss covered; some are bright, shiny and microchipped, and one of the most recent ones marks out the impact of computer colouring on the medium. Of course the computer and its software are just tools to be used in different ways; and in many of the world's comics cultures they have been used simply as a new, easier way of adding the traditional flat colour to black and white drawings. In the American mainstream though, colourists have used packages such as Adobe Photoshop to alter the appearance of comics radically and to take on a much more dominant role than formerly in defining the look of the finished product. In doing so they have raised certain fundamental questions about the purpose of colour in comics.



1910: Winsor McCay draws the speed lines. The colourist applies a little colour to them to enhance the blurring effect, but concentrates on application of flat, "realistic" colour to figures and background

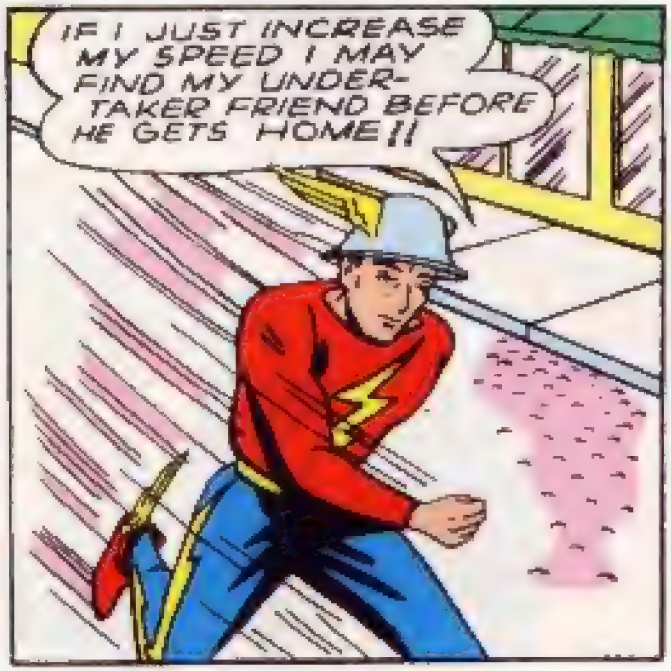
Why should comics be coloured in the first place? Two obvious reasons might be that colour makes two dimensional line art look brighter and more attractive, and that because we see in colour, its addition to line art increases that art's representational realism.

In fact, traditional colour techniques are far from being realistic. Skies and seas are rarely bright blue, grass is not a uniform shade of bright green, few Caucasians have pink skin and so forth. Flat colour is thus as much an iconic approximation of real colour as are the black lines on white paper which it embellishes a visual cue rather than an accurate rendition of three dimensional reality. Nevertheless, skies *are* sometimes blue and grass *is* generally green, so even the four colour printing used for comics from the 1890s to the 1990s served to enhance their realism.

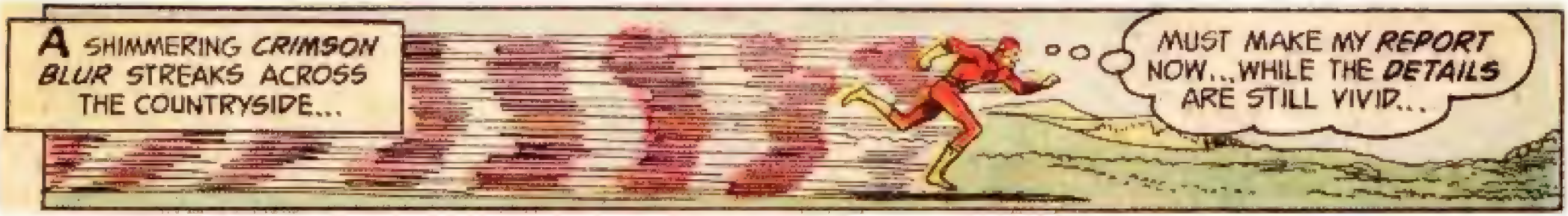
The far more sophisticated techniques offered to the colourist by packages like Photoshop might thus be expected to result in a greatly enhanced sense of realism in comic art. And so they do but, I would argue, in a rather different manner from the flat colouring which they have by now all but supplanted in the American mainstream.

As its name suggests, Photoshop originated as a program for the retouching of photographic images. Although with every subsequent version more colouring, painting and drawing facilities have been added to it, it retains a fundamental approach to image manipulation which is defined by photo-realism rather than by the iconic realism of line art.

Consequently, many current American mainstream comics are demonstrating that a major shift in the nature of



1940s: early superhero comicbook colouring is applied in the same way as in the McCay panel but rather more simplistically. The pink applied to the drawn speed lines could be intended to reflect the colour of Flash's shirt, but is also used to add colour to the street surface!



1970s: the colourist takes a more active role in defining the drawn speed lines, applying vertical patches of colour to suggest after-images left visible of the speeding Flash

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1990s: drawn speed lines are replaced by swathes of textured colour applied by a computer colourist. Note also the gradented blue of the sky in the background

comics is taking place, one in which the colourist's role is becoming less that of a painter and more that of a photographer - and the deployment of iconic techniques indicating realism is becoming less the responsibility of the pencil and ink artists and more that of the colourist. This is indeed a new "milestone"! Such older landmarks as the theories concerning the expressiveness of line developed by William Hogarth and Rodolphe Töpffer are giving way to a new regime in which, it seems, line art may be becoming less the core element of comics, to which colour is applied, and more a skeletal framework to be fleshed out, given form, by the colour. The images on this page show some examples how the application of colour to a traditionally drawn iconic technique - that of "speed lines" - has varied towards that direction throughout the 20th century.

What might the increasing adoption of such areas as panel depth, perspective, lighting angles and motion blurring by the colourists mean for the future of these comic books? As yet it's too early to tell - and with the speed at which software capabilities are developed, it can probably be assumed that current developments are only the very first of changes to come.

One observation that can be made, though, is that the use of Photoshop is almost inevitably shifting the appearance of the American comics closer to that of computer games; hardly surprisingly, since Adobe Photoshop is also an essential tool of multimedia graphic designers. And with "paperless" publications - like the one you're reading right now! - becoming increasingly common, perhaps the future for the American mainstream may be a special form of CGI animation, "printed" on an electronic paper subtitute. **BL**

MITZY FANTASTICO

WHEN I was young, I had ambition. When teachers would ask everyone what they wanted to be when they grew up, they'd say "a fireman", or "an actor", or even "a bus driver" from those children who seemed to develop a sense of under-achievement so early in life. But what did I say? "Supervillain". Well, bad guy was the actual wording, but you get my point.

Supervillains always had charm to me. Skeletor was clearly cooler. He had that whole staff/cloak/unreliable goons thing going on. Mumm-Ra was all that. And Megatron? He was a gun, man. A gun! And thus my direction in life was clear, and my teachers began to worry a little more.

But am I there now? No. No I'm bloody not. No cloak, no throne, no secret undersea base, no death robots and no unreliable piranha-faced goons. Why is this so? Why have I reached the prime age of 25 and not had one punch-up with an overly-testos-teroned man in lycra while fleeing from the scene of a bank robbery? I'll tell you why – I have no reason to be a villain. It's true. I'm quite happy with my looks, my life, my friends and family. Villains need a history, they need an origin, they need a motive! Which is what confuses me about comics supervillains. None of them seem to have a reason for doing it. Not a legitimate reason. And destroying the world is no logical reason. Except on Tuesdays.

I've always known the supercrook formulae was a bit lame, and pumps out its fair share of cliché month after month. But lately I can't even look at Dr. Polaris and co. without wondering exactly what made them decide to get up in the morning, don some spandex and rob a bank. There're so many stupid supervillains being created each month who have no real point to the series other than filling up 65% of the plot for the latest 32 pages of slugfest. In the last ten years, how many supervillains have there been that have done anything, no matter how odd the final plan is, with a logical reasoning behind doing it? People say superheroes are dumb? Well, birds of a feather, and all that, eh?

So, yes. Marvel, DC, Image and whoever else – some more interesting villains would be nice. And, as a helper, here's my five-fave of villains who've managed to do something with good reason.

1) **Dr. Kreigstein** (Wildstorm) deserves a mention. He made superheroes so he could make the world a better place. Kinda. Shame they all turned out to be xenophobic patriot lugnuts. That's what you get when you flyer every Starbucks across the US.

2) **Mysterio** (Marvel) – during that DD relaunch that that *Mallrats* guy did. Misty decides to make DD's life hell to prove he's still got what it takes. He was also missing several apples at the time, which also gives him an excuse.

3) **Starro T Conqueror** (DC) did many many silly things, but he was a giant space starfish, which pretty much limits any other daytime activities.

4) The **robot** from *Lost in Space* continually got Will Robinson in danger and didn't lift a finger to help him. Will's very existence was reason enough to do such things.

5) Actually, I don't have a fifth entry. Those last two were pretty ropey. I should really think my articles out better.

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LEARNING CURVES

Sarah Littlehales speculates to accumulate

Kids' Stuff

HOW many of us have been faced with the canard that "comics are for kids"? I know I have. Actually I got "aren't you too old for that?" but it's the same thing. It's something that we've fought against for so long that as adults we tend to look down on the comics that actually are made for kids. What's wrong with having superheroes for kids?

How many grown ups have been dragged into a comic book shop by their kids and while there picked up a title that they used to read when they too were kids? I've seen it happen dozens of times and you can be sure that once the spark of recognition and nostalgia hits home they'll be reading again as if that generation gap never happened. There's a certain charm involved when a comic book lures an old reader back due to the innocent appeal it had many years ago.

Times are changing. We've grown up and expect our heroes to grow with us. They learn their lessons, desperately fight tooth and nail to save the world and occasionally sacrifice their lives. They always save the day but are growing darker and more bitter along the way. The most recent example of this is the **X-Men**. Under Grant Morrison's makeover they've exchanged the rainbow-coloured spandex for bikers' leathers and the fluorescent yellow of ultra-violet lit night clubs. Sex and death are always pushed to the front of the story. More adult themes are being brought in for an adult audience, as if you should be ashamed to admit that you enjoy those traditional grandiose multicoloured superheroics.

That's all fine and dandy, but it's hardly escapist. Personally I enjoy superheroics for the adventure - to escape from all the pressure and issues of everyday life. There's still more than enough room for the kid inside us all. There will always be a need for something more innocent that doesn't have to rely on the more crude and brutal aspects of life to be enjoyed. And I can prove it.

Herobears & Godmothers

This little gem from Astonish Comics features the truly amazing non-inked pencils of Mike Kunkel. There is no surer guarantee of a beautifully drawn adventure for all ages than work by a former Disney animator and this provides that in spades. Unashamedly innocent, the back cover boasts: "Remember your childhood, and pass it on"; a statement that rings true because this is one title that flies off the shelves faster than a ten foot bear can take to the skies. The first two issues are now on their third printing - it sells out no matter how many times the comic shops re-order it - and back issues of the first print run demand a price of around ten dollars each. Not bad considering there have only been three issues so far!

The simple characters with bold defining traits and appearances in an easy to follow story have caused **Herobear** to be compared with Jeff Smith's continuing epic, **Bone**. However, it bears a more canny likeness in its style and concept to another young boy and his much loved stuffed companion.

Calvin & Hobbes never aged in the ten years during which Bill Watterson produced the classic strip. They continued to play in their imaginary world, baffle the grown-ups, and live to annoy (and in fear of) Susie Derkins. Although the last **Calvin & Hobbes** strip was drawn in January 1996, their popularity has never ceased. Each of the books that collect the many strips has sold over a million copies in the first year of publication alone. In comic book terms that's nearly five times the amount of one issue of Grant Morrison's **New X-Men**. Comparable to such fine titles, it seems that **Herobear and the Kid** will be around for a long time to come, and loved for even longer after that.

There are other children's comics that stand out as being suitable for grown ups but there are also occasions when the grown ups demand to see more innocent tales from their creators. When Jill Thompson drew a 'little' version of Vertigo's **Sandman** both she and DC's offices were inundated with requests for more of these 'little' Sandman characters.

Thompson took the rest of The Endless and transformed them into adorable characters for the children's book **The Little Endless**. These are mature concept characters embodying different aspects of life and death, from a title that pulled no punches when dealing with the worst aspects of humanity; and their fans wanted to see them as children! Although it was easy to translate into a more innocent story for an older audience, there was always the problem that a younger reader might want to discover more of this intriguing new world, read **Sandman** and find more than they bargained for. So Vertigo came up with their first "Mature Readers for All Ages" title, and Thompson provided the story that the fans demanded to see.

Already with a large fan base of her own, Jill Thompson has previously produced a series of stories for children that are just as loved by adults.

Her stories are popular with all generations for mixing our world with that of the 'Fright Side', where there is a constant blend of innocent fun and wonderful grotesque Halloween humour. And despite being aimed at children Thompson's art never panders to the cute and fluffy, always being more uncontrollable and electric, just like her characters. The stories never talk down to their target audience, leaving plenty of room for characters to grow and inviting in readers of all ages.

No matter whether it's a new hardback self-contained story or a new limited series, **Scary Godmother** always sells out and needs to be restocked. Pretty impressive when you consider that it's a comic aimed at children published by a company more renowned for its "T&A" titles. The only way to tell that it's from Sirius Entertainment is from the advert pages in the back of the comic. After an enchanting story you're caught off guard by adverts featuring scantily clad women in exotic poses. It just goes to show that even the most "mature" of audiences can appreciate a well–written children's story.

For so long the comics publishers have produced comics in the belief that their readership was largely made up of kids. Unfortunately this couldn't be further from the truth. In today's world of PS2, cars and under-age drinking it would seem that there's no future hope for the comic book industry. However, with **Scary Godmother** stories and the adventures of **Herobear and the Kid** you can be sure that a whole new generation is being introduced to quality comics.

If publishers can capture the imagination and interest of children before they hit their teens, then there's a bright future for the comic book industry. BL

Sarah's Tips:

If the titles mentioned interest you, why not check out: **Thieves and Kings** (I Box Publishing), **Little Gloomy** (Slave Labour), **Castle Waiting** (Cliq Press & Cartoon Books) and **Leave it to Chance** (Image)

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MAN ON A MISSION

Martin Shipp's vision of a better comics industry

WHERE were we?

That's right, I was telling you that it's all your fault. Because it is. It's mine as well. Case in point; I don't exist in a vacuum. I quite happily trot down to my local comics shop about once a week and when I'm there I buy a number of publications. It's really quite pathetic, when you consider it. A man who rails against the quality of the majority of the output in a given medium, sniffing around a shop full of the most egregious examples of the shoddiness he rails against and yet still desperately searching for something – anything – that might satisfy the craving.

I'd imagine it's what the heroin addict goes through, scoring cut gear when the good stuff's not forthcoming. Or what the smoker suffers late at night when the last Silk Cut has burned down to a mocking worm of grey ash and the late-night garage has finally closed but the need for that seven-second hit of nicotine still courses through the veins. If the usual, preferred stuff isn't immediately to hand, even that scrounged Rothmans Royal tastes good.

So anyway I'm there, on new comics day, just as I am every week. I'm looking at the display of this week's new things, comparing the rows on the walls to the rows on the racks, making sure I have a look at everything, just in case the guy who puts together the standing orders missed something. And I look at a couple of the other fellows who are in the shop, some of whom are regulars and who have that gallows kameraderie that people who share a minority interest sometimes have, and I see them looking at, say, **The Defenders** or **The Titans** or **Star Wars** and I say to myself: "How could you waste your time and your money on that crap?"

And then I look at the comics I have in my own hands and the terrible, haunting conclusion smacks me in the forebrain like a big piece of wood with a nail through the end and I ask myself: "How could you waste your time and your money on this crap?" I can justify it just as we all can. It's my money and I'll spend it as I wish. Everybody has a vice, a guilty pleasure; at least mine's legal and only slightly damaging to my health.

The fact that I smuggle them into my house under my coat and read them in isolation, allowing nobody to see me? That's neither here nor there.

But all this isn't good enough, is it? In the last **Borderline** I stated that this column would be about Better Comics and how to get them. Not just going out and buying Better Comics; that could be – and should be – as easy as changing your supplier for one who takes more chances and who may well find themselves making more money as a result. I'm talking about a revolution; actually changing the structures of the medium, of its execution and of the industry that surrounds it until we see a raised overall standard, a new paradigm that makes the average issue of **X-Men** look like the cave painting it is.

To do this we'll have to make sacrifices. That's right. I said "We". You and me, together. We start not by buying Better Comics but by not buying Worse Comics. Next time we're in our dealer's comics crack house, we're going to go along the shelves as usual, but this time we're going to do it differently. We're not going to pick things up – for, as any sales psychologist will tell you, touching is ninety per cent of the sale. We're just going to look, even at those comics we've bought month in month out for years. We're going to ask ourselves: "Do I need this?" Not "Do I want this?" but "Will this improve my life, by a measurable quantity, for an appreciable amount of time?" If the answer isn't a resounding, unarguable "Yes!" with at least one exclamation mark, then we're going to leave that comic on the shelf. And we'll do this again and again – over and over until that magic day when we're only buying Better Comics and the Worse Comics wither and die on the shelves.

You may not think you can do it. Maybe you can't, at least not alone. I think you can, though. I believe in you. I expect it of you. We start on our next trip to the shop, and we report back here next month.

Ready?

Then let's do it. BL

WHY YOU ARE READING: Michael Brown, Greenford, Middlesex, UK: "My current favourite comic is **Blade of the Immortal** by Dark Horse Comics. I'd never been drawn to manga before, but the unique art style and the gripping story has made this a must read!"

Stanley's Soapbox

IGNORANCE is bliss. Or in some cases it just highlights how out of touch with things some people can be. Take the sales charts published by www.ICV2.com – wonderful bit of industry information for anyone who knows how to interpret them. Sadly, if you don't know what you're talking about when you start, the likelihood is you'll end up regretting it. Once something goes into print, it's there for the rest of eternity...

One wonders what DC Comics must have made of the suggestion recently that Warren Ellis's **Transmetropolitan** was in serious danger of being cancelled because of low sales. What? How do these rumours gets started? Sometimes one has to wonder what the people who propagate them use for thinking equipment... Surely the instigator of this nugget must have known that sales of anything over 18,000 for a Vertigo title is pretty amazing? Or that if the comic only sold two-dozen copies, it would still stay in print? And there're two reasons for that: 1) the trade paperback collections sell by the shedload, making them considerably more viable than the comic, and 2) it's a finite series, it's due to finish at #60 - this has been common knowledge for a while now.

What Soapbox finds even more disturbing is that a completely speculative rumour based on a dangerous little gem of information (**Transmet**'s sales), managed to turn what should have been an upbeat bit of info, for an imprint that seems to be turning the corner in terms of sales and credibility, into a doom and gloom-laden scenario.

Or perhaps some people remember when **The Sandman** did 55,000 copies a month (a figure which would make it a regular top 10 title, today) and forget that in the days when **The Sandman** was huge, **The X-Men** was selling in excess of 200,000 copies per month. BL

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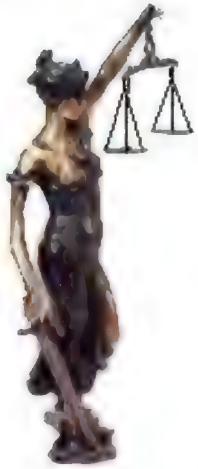
THE VERDICT
COMICS REVIEWS

THIS MONTH'S JURY:



Dan Black
D.R. Booth
Adrian Brown
Rob Cave
Andy Cheverton
Jennifer Cole
Kelvin Green
Kevin Hill
Rol Hirst
Mike Kidson
Nigel Lowry
Andrew Luke
David McLintock
Andy Winter

Would you like to join our reviews team– The Borderline Psychotics? All you have to do is send a sample of two reviews to Andy Winter: reviews@borderlinemediahall.co.uk and he'll get in touch!

Angel and the Ape #1
DC/Vertigo
By Howard Chaykin, David Tischman and Philip Bond

Total coincidence that this appears just as *Planet Of The Apes* hits the screens, although the two are worlds apart. A revival of a celebrated DC failure of the flower power age, some of the jokey innuendo herein wouldn't sound out of character if mouthed by Charles Hawtrey.

Howard Chaykin and David Tischman script, Phillip Bond supplies the clunky, chunky cartoony art. Leggy blonde detectives Angel O'Day and her hirsute silent companion Sam Simeon search out missing model Bambi Dextrous (oh, dear), against a backdrop of innuendo and double entendres. It seems strangely dated, perhaps deliberately so. And Art Adams has done better covers in his time.

The Verdict: Not my poison, I'll pass on the next issue. Others might get a laugh from it though. (DM)

Angel and the Ape #1
DC/Vertigo
By Howard Chaykin, David Tischman and Philip Bond

Few surprises here, except that Chaykin appears to be running on autopilot. Bond's pretty, cartoony art, looking lusher than it did back in the days of **Wired World**, does a good job of capturing that mixture of innocence and cheesecake which informed the Oksner/Wood originals, better, in fact, than Phil Foglio did in his 1991 miniseries.

Chaykin gets Angel and Sam right too, the one innocent, the other dumb– but the rest of his characters spout the usual mixture of hard boiled, world weary witticisms larded with obscenities, and that's where it all falls down. Somehow it seems half-hearted, perhaps it seemed like a good idea at the time but became a chore in the execution? Whatever, it's a mildly diverting but very minor piece, and nothing more.

The Verdict: Pretty to look at, disappointing to read. (MK)

Battle Chasers #9
Image
By Joe Madureira and Adam Warren

By the numbers fantasy fare tale of a lad growing up not knowing his famous father, who turns out to be a wrong 'un. The art is pleasant to look at, in that current style Image have promoted (cartoon, manga), which is gonna seem so passé five years from now. Padded with sketches (Madureira's dog, for cripes sakes!), and an amusing piece of fluff from Adam Warren at the back, there are probably worse ways of wasting 15 minutes.

The Verdict: No new earth ploughed here and all but impenetrable to new readers. Pass. (DM)

Daredevil #22
Marvel
By Bob Gale and Phil Winslade

As Phil Winslade's graduation from miniseries to regular book continues to pick up pace, under the guidance of the brilliant and witty Bob Gale, you find yourself realising that the high concept behind the duo's first story arc is so wonderfully inspired and yet so simple that it's almost criminal it took more than 35 years for someone to think of it.

Ads gruntled citizen is suing Daredevil for property damage sustained as a side effect of fighting the good fight, and he's hired the superhero's alter ego, lawyer Matt Murdock, to prosecute. In a move that increasingly seems to be rash and ill advised, Matt has taken on the case (mainly to prevent anyone else from doing so). He now has to contend with a client determined to turn the entire event into a media circus, his firm's newly-hired investigator whose distaste for costumed vigilantes inspires her to come up with brilliantly inventive ways of ensuring DD gets what's coming to him, and a law partner who, having been created for the sake of having some fat comic relief, is waaaay out of his depth. The result is a mix of remarkably clever black comedy reminiscent of the same team's **Ant-Man's Big Christmas** one-shot, and I could happily stand lots more of it.

In this issue, Matt and Foggy get a second client with a claim against DD, DD gets himself a defence lawyer, and doesn't do himself a lot of favours in front of the TV cameras. We're left hoping that the book can continue to be this good for many months to come. Especially now that it's back on schedule.

The Verdict: Clever, widely funny and even regular. What more could we want? (JC)

Daredevil: Yellow #3
Marvel Knights
By Jeph Loeb & Tim Sale

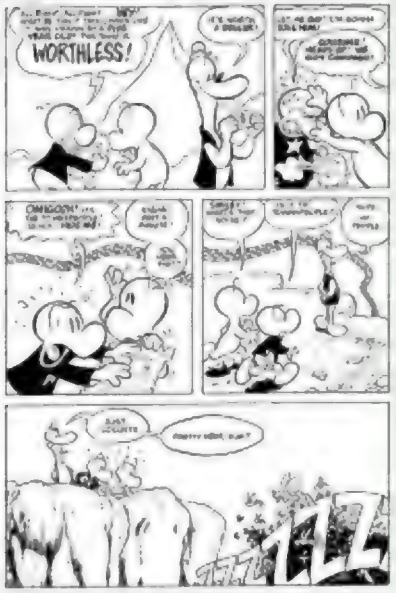
Book Three and the focus of this series becomes more obvious; this is not so much a redundant retelling of past stories, but Matt Murdock's farewell to both Karen Page and his father. Sure, we get the Fantastic Four and the Owl, but the caption text tells us what this story is about, and a fine, romantic story it's shaping up to be. There's less of a *noir* atmosphere than in the creators' Batman tales, but the period setting is nicely detailed and Loeb does excel at fine character touches, such as Matt being surprised at hearing the Thing's loud heartbeat.

The art by Sale is all we would expect and shows that we really shouldn't take good artists for granted; for this is quite beautiful work both from a storytelling and aesthetic viewpoint. Why, though, has Marvel credited the colourist after the letterer on the credits page? The book is finely lettered (from Starking's Comicraft, we should expect so), but Matt Hollingsworth's painted colouring is a highlight of the comic.

The Verdict: A ground level, character-driven superhero comic; solidly and interestingly written, with attractive and capable art. And Matt Hollingsworth painted it, don't forget. (AC)

Detective Comics #761
DC Comics
By Greg Rucka, Shawn Martinborough and Jesse Delperdang / Ed Brubaker and Darwyn Cooke

Interesting to see the two best Bat-writers of the



Bone #43

Bone #1: Tenth Anniversary Special Edition
Cartoon Books
By Jeff Smith

In comparing the latest issue of **Bone** with the new, coloured re-release of the first, it's amazing to see how much the tone of the book has changed. While the artwork has evolved only slightly, which is no bad thing when you have the storytelling abilities of Smith, the early sense of fun and whimsical charm has been gradually replaced with dark forebodings and hidden mysteries.

The latest issue finds Fone and crew safely out of danger, although again there are ominous portents. The first issue is neither harmed nor enhanced by the added colour, except for the impressive first shot of the valley, but suffers from a dull analysis of the preceding strip by comics historian R.C. Harvey. This is lessened somewhat by the free PVC figure of Fone Bone, and although the emphasis has shifted from humour to mystery, **Bone** remains as satisfying as ever.

The Verdict: The latest issue is as enjoyable as the first but for different reasons. Bone still stands as one of the most rewarding ongoing series around today. (NL)

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moment working on the same book – both experts at hard-boiled detective adventures, yet each with a very distinct writing style.

Greg Rucka continues to explore the new supporting cast as Bruce Wayne's bodyguard Sasha undergoes a typically intensive initiation and the GCPD face Internal Affairs. Gritty, down-to-earth and strongly character-based with a decidedly pulp style to both art and colouring, though Rucka paces his stories slowly, obviously with trade paperbacks in mind.

By contrast, Ed Brubaker's **Trail Of The Catwoman** crams the maximum of plot and action into its eight pages, with Brubaker relishing the chance to write gumshoe PI Slam Bradley and Darwyn Cooke providing cool, heavily Bob Kane-influenced visuals.

The Verdict: Seldom before has this book so accurately reflected its title. (RH)

Dork #9

Slave Labor

By Evan Dorkin

There are more jokes (and laugh-out-loud jokes at that) on the first page of this than most other comics manage per issue (and if that Two-Face gag does get Dork in sued, then there's no justice in the world).

The Soda Thief, originally from Two Morrow's **Streetwise** anthology, is an autobiographical story of soda addiction that is funny and gross in equal measure. That is, it's moderately amusing throughout, but really gross at the end. I shall be decanting my coke into a glass from now on . . .

The Murder Family is a strip I just don't get. It's *The Addams Family* taken to *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* extremes and written as a TV sitcom. The only really funny parts of this strip are the "advert breaks", particularly the news items on Keith Richards and Rage Against The Machine. As these are separate from the main story, they tend to stand alone and point out the deficiencies of the main strip rather than add to them.

The Island Of Misfit Candy would really have worked better as a three-panel strip; it staggers along aimlessly when stretched to two pages.

The Eltingville Club is, for my money, the highlight of the comic. It's nearly always the best part of Dork, because it balances along that knife-edge of love and hate that all fanboys feel when confronted with a new spin-off comic, a new action figure, a new sequel. We don't need them, we don't want them and, sometimes – like leaving the cinema after *The Phantom Menace* – we wish we'd had the backbone to just say, "No. No more. This stops here and now". Having said that, this is a more affectionate portrayal than usual.

And the final page has a half-dozen quality three-panel strips, one of which (*Cletus and Billy-Bob in What's A Little Anal Probing Between Friends?*) made me laugh so hard I coughed hot tea out through my nose. If that's not a recommendation, I don't know what is.

The Verdict: Often funnier in the quick-fire style of the short strips, but worth it for those and, as ever, the Eltingville boys. (AC)

Dragon Ball Z Part 4 #9

Viz Communications

By Akira Toriyama

This comic is infuriating. Really infuriating. You will grow to despise it. But not for the reasons you might think. Story-wise this issue could not be better, Son Gohan, Kuririn and Vegeta are still in a battle for their lives on the planet Namek, against the evil Ginyu squad – and they aren't doing well. In fact, all three almost die. Meanwhile, the incredibly evil Freeza attempts to use the seven Dragon Balls to gain immortality, but fails miserably, prompting him to head off in search of a native of Namek to discover how to use the Dragon Balls to gain his wish.

So, why is this comic infuriating? Well, just as things become incredibly bleak, Son Goku – the main character – arrives. And just as things are about to kick off, the issue ends. So, another month to wait... a whole *month*!

Toriyama knows how to serialise a comic, leaving readers salivating for more high speed, super-powered kung-fu action. This is monthly comics at their best, you read it, it stops before the good bits, so you need to read the next one, and *that* stops before the next good bit, and so on. It is truly infuriating – but oh so good, so, so, good.

The Verdict: Toriyama continues to push the envelope of fight scenes in this gloriously-stylised battle filled comic. (KH)

Elektra #2

Marvel Knights

By Brian Michael Bendis and Chuck Austen

Uh, hi… My name's Andrew and I like Brian Michael Bendis comics. Most days I'm okay. A little **Powers** isn't going to hurt. And **Ultimate Marvel Team-Up** never killed anybody. So, I go from day to day, whatever I can afford. One day at a time, hey? It's all you can do . . .

But now I got this **Elektra** shit to deal with, and I just don't know, man. I think I'm going too far, y'know? And they're cutting it with some cheap junk, I'm telling you. I used to take a Bendis hit and it would be quality stuff – none of your rubbish. But this **Elektra** is cut with some low-grade artwork. Real bad shit, no lie. It's getting so I can't get high any more, you know? You get the Bendis hit, same as it ever was, but then the Austen drags you down and leaves you low. That's not right, man. That's not right at all.

The alternative cover's gorgeous though – top-notch Sienkiewicz, like in the old days. Those were the times, weren't they? Man . . . but this is just to reel you in, to make it look like you're getting the good stuff, when inside it's cut with cheap crap and it's just not the same. First one's always free, huh? Ain't life a bitch?

The Verdict: Caught and charged with possession and unlikely to kick the habit for a few issues yet. Hopelessly hooked on the Bendis, but not going anywhere near the 100% pure Austen of U.S War Machine. Even a junkie has to have standards. (AC)

Fantastic Four #46

Marvel Comics

By Carlos Pacheco, Jeph Loeb, Jeff Johnson and various.

Well, it didn't take too long for this title to go down the pan, did it? Ostensibly, this has three writers, a fill-in penciller and two inkers. The only thing it seems short of is a capable editor, for this is garbled, inaccessible nonsense, embarrassing itself when viewed against the Ultimate and Marvel Knights comics.

Anyway, various B-list heroes from across the dimensions turn up to save the world from Abraxas, who is tougher than Galadus, and who has incapacitated the Watcher for plot reasons yet to be explained. Monsters (who represent, "a fraction of Abraxas' power") attack, although Abraxas himself appears to be busy elsewhere. And the Silver Surfer gets eaten by

The Ultron Imperative

Marvel

By various

There's a question to be asked in why **The Ultron Imperative** wasn't this year's **Avengers Annual**, allowing that publication's contents (which tied up developments from the regular series) to appear in the monthly book, where they surely belonged. That aside, there's little to complain about in this entertaining one-shot, which brings together the talents of four writers who, between them, are responsible for virtually all the issues worth reading throughout the book's near 40-year history – Kurt Busiek, Steve Englehart, Roger Stern and Roy Thomas – interpreted by a plethora of artistic talent young and old.

As the title suggests, the Avengers' android nemesis is up to no good again, but the main protagonist is actually Alkema, the "wife" Ultron built for himself in **West Coast Avengers**. Cue a perfect excuse for the regular A-team to be joined by their prodigal son Hawkeye, on whose late wife Mockingbird the robot's mind is modelled. The ensuing battle is never going to be easy on old Hawk's heartstrings, and Alkema milks this to the max. Knowing that due to the unshakeable rules of comics pathos, it's ultimately going to have to be Hawkeye who takes her down, Alkema makes the most of taunting him over whether or not there's a final spark of Bobbi Barton left inside her heartless metal shell. Their final exchange – well, that would be telling, but anyone who can get to the end of this with a dry eye hasn't got the right to call themselves a fanboy. Which, in a way, answers the question as to why all this had to be done outside of the usual continuity. With a thousand sub-squads of Avengers running around all over the globe, there just isn't room left for characterisation this good any more.

The Verdict: Make sure you don't let excuses like not having an extra £5 in this month's comic budget prevent you from buying this. You don't really need to eat, do you? (JC)

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THE VERDICT

microdictic mist (despite Reed being able to pick it up by the handful). Time was when the death of a Marvel hero would mean something, but here it's over in a couple of panels and only mentioned twice in passing thereafter. The only indication that the Surfer is actually dead is from a footnote on the letters page. Talk about understated.

The Verdict: Utter cobblers. Poorly plotted, badly scripted, well drawn (if basically functional art is your thing), and almost without merit. Really quite awful. (AC)

Fantastic Four 2001
Marvel
By Jeph Loeb, Kevin Maguire and Wade Von Grawbadger

One of Marvel's final annuals, this is a throwback to older days when their stories actually had an impact on the regular series, although, as the opening salvo of a new story arc, this should really have been printed in the monthly title.

The plot by regular **FF** artist Carlos Pacheco is very slight, revolving around Galactus's skull crashing down into Times Square, and the apocalypse it heralds, but there are some nice moments in Loeb's dialogue, interesting appearances by forgotten or dead characters, and it's always nice to see Kevin Maguire's artwork. There's also a nicely drawn but pointless back-up strip. 14 panels over six pages leaves no room for plot in a thin excuse for the Thing to slap Dragon Man one and then feel sorry for him.

The Verdict: Attractive artwork isn't enough reason to take this story away from the regular series where it should really have run. (NL)

Flash #176
DC Comics
By Geoff Johns with Scott Kolins

Flash: Iron Heights
By Geoff Johns and Ethan Van Sciver

Writer Geoff Johns is doing all the right things. He's building a new and fascinating supporting cast, most notably detectives Chyre (who looks like he's walked straight out of **Sin City**) and Morillo (with his own "mutant healing ability"). He's re-establishing the Flash Rogues Gallery – once so strong it rivalled that of Spidey and Bats, but long neglected by modern writers. And he's working with some truly stunning artists – from the rejuvenated Scott Kolins (combining classic Byrne and Miller with large-scale Mobius) to the deliciously Perezian detailing of Van Sciver and Rollins on the Prestige Format (but in-continuity) **Iron Heights**. Surely then, **Flash** should be one of the best superhero books on the market right now, right? Not quite . .

The main problem is that the plots are interesting but too thinly spread (a common complaint in these written-for-reprint days, but **Flash** *isn't* one of DC's regularly trade-collected titles). While this allows Kolins more chance to shine, it leaves the reader with little more than a five minute quickie. **Iron Heights** attempts to correct this, but with more bang for more bucks, focussing on Keystone's answer to Arkham and the new Rogues Gallery. The killer disease plot seems dunsily tacked on though, bringing a little action into what is essentially a character story.

The Verdict: Getting better all the time . . but still a little way to go before it attains greatness. (RH)

Hellboy: The Conqueror Worm #1-4
Dark Horse/Maverick
By Mike Mignola

A difficult one, this. It's all very well done; Mignola's story is constructed competently enough, and the artwork is as good as ever (if not better), but this comic doesn't seem to be *about* anything. It's another one of those stories wherein Hellboy is sent off to a mysterious castle to do battle with a mysterious creature, just like every other Hellboy story. It's certainly reached the point – like **Sin City** before it – where some sort of long term plot or series goal needs to take precedence before we all wander off and do something else with our time and money.

Mignola is excellent at character design; both Lobster Johnson and Roger the Homunculus are interesting creations, but never rise above being concepts to become real characters.

Luckily, there are some elements that are left hanging for the next series. Unfortunately, if the last letters page is to be believed, Mignola has a couple of other projects next in line for his attention. Hopefully, these will refresh and inspire him to return to Hellboy with something more demanding and fulfilling than this.

The Verdict: Like Sergio Leone's Dollars Trilogy, these are the same old characters in the same old story. Alas, Mignola is no Leone, and this is stretching a familiar format very thin indeed. (AC)

Judge Dredd Megazine #1-2
Rebellion
By various

It's bigger but is it better? A thumping 100 pages for £3.95, six strips, three new, three "classic", it certainly doesn't skimp on pages for outlay. *Dredd* is typical whimsical Wagner, *Lemmy Zero* by Andy Diggle and Jock is okay, *Wardog* has lots of luverly violence, as you'd expect from Dan Abnett.

There are also welcome reprints for Ellis's ground breaking *Lazarus Churchyard*, plus shlock-teens *DR and Quinch* (proving Alan Moore's humour skills are of long vintage). The standard of the reprints is only let down by the inclusion of the quaint and surely rarely requested *Ro-Busters*, which is dated in both story and art.

The Verdict: As much reading as any other four quid glossy, and perfect to dip into when visiting the doughnut in granny's greenhouse. And no fag adverts. (DM)

Just Imagine Stan Lee with Jim Lee creating Wonder Woman
DC Comics
By Stan Lee and Jim Lee

Why? No, it's a serious question. Why should anyone be interested in what the former chief editor and principal writer of Marvel Comics might make out of the names of DC's best-known characters? While Stan in his prime working on the genuine Superman, Batman et al. might once have been a fan's dream, Stan in semi-retirement playing at *creating* those characters anew seems singularly pointless. And, in fact, this is just a competent, run of the mill story about a magical heroine fighting an unreasonably vicious businessman with demonic powers and a lust for world domination. Just Imagine Stan Lee creating an Image Comic? No need. Here it is.

The Verdict: Unless you're a big fan of Jim Lee's art, save your money. (MK)

Kane #81
Dancing Elephant Press
By Paul Grist

With half his time now taken up self-publishing **Jack Staff**, this, Paul Grist's tale of police corruption, makes less frequent appearances on our comics shelves. This is a shame, as **Kane** is a consistently entertaining read.

Six months ago Police Detective Kane shot his partner Dennis Harvey dead. Harvey stood accused of corruption. Following a suspension, Kane is now back on active duty. The pacing of

Slow News Day #1
Slave Labor Graphics
By And Watson

I haven't read very much of And Watson's work before, mainly because I thought his **Buffy** comics were awful. So, here I am, reliably informed that the writer/artist's more personal stuff is worth a look, faced with **Slow News Day**. And, boy, do I feel like an arse.

American Katharine Washington arrives in Britain on a work placement at the small town offices of the Wheatstone Mercury newspaper. The stage is set for a culture clash comedy when she meets the spiky, not to mention very English, reporter Owen Holmes. The key to Watson's success here is that he refrains from using either of his characters as the defenceless butt of jokes, which is refreshing, allowing both Owen and Katharine to give as good as they get. His scripting is effortlessly incisive, producing well-detailed, fully formed characters with an economy that is quite astonishing.

The only thing simpler than Watson's writing is his artwork, which fills the page with solid, unadorned, well thought-out lines.

In just one issue, we're presented with two main characters both of which are sympathetic and about whom you want to read more. But issue two is a couple of months away, so I'll just have to pass the time tracking down other And Watson series.

The Verdict: Refreshing, subdued and totally recommended. I'm sure everybody apart from me is already buying this but, just in case, get down to your LCS and check it out. (AC)

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THE VERDICT

the overall story arc can often seem agonisingly slow and a tad repetitive but each replaying of the events surrounding Kane's actions that night reveals slightly more about both characters and the state of New Eden's corruption-ridden 39th Precinct.

Aside from the main story, this latest issue also sees the (sort of) return of the tribute to Adam West's *Batman* that is Megaman, as Grist explores the idea of just what kind of person wants to believe in superheroes anyway.

The simplicity of the artwork (reminiscent of Marc Hempel) belies the narrative complexity of the comic, with a variety of visual jokes and puns scattered throughout the book with varying degrees of subtlety.

Meanwhile, in the background, we are left to wonder about New Eden's resident crime Boss Oscar Darke (a man with more than a passing resemblance to former Marvel boss Jim Shooter). What forces could be moving to challenge his position and just what might it mean for New Eden's Finest?

The Verdict: A gripping and entertaining read that just leaves you wishing Kane were both longer and more frequent. For my money this is the best cop comic being produced today. (RC)

Monster World #4

Wildstorm/DC

By Scott Lobdell and Carlos Meglia

Er, what's going on? For once a tad more exposition might due in new readers, but it appears that some disparate, weird characters have got stuck on Monster World. It's the sort of place where any old horror or fantasy cliché might pop up at any moment, be it vampires, Frankenstein's monsters, werewolves or even elves. (There's no sign of the Mummy, though, he could've crumbled in previous issues for all I know).

Scott Lobdell does the words, Carlos Meglia the cutesy Manga/cartoon-style art. At a whopping 18 pages, three of them spreads, value is at a premium. Padded with proposed covers for future issues if these sell. Which I doubt.

The Verdict: Harmless but not totally harmless. That said, I won't be frantically seeking out earlier issues, nor later ones for that matter. (DM)

Murder Me Dead #7

El Capitan

By David Lapham

Moving away from the self-contained stories of his ongoing self-published title, **Stray Bullets**, Lapham's first conspicuously continuing story is as fantastically observed and finely crafted as we have come to expect.

This issue sees Steve out of prison and seeking the woman who put him there, his new wife Tara Torres. There's something desperately mundane about Steve's desire to settle down with his high-school sweetheart in the wake of his ex-wife's apparent suicide, as each issue, forces conspire to heap more woes upon his head.

The artwork is equally as harsh as the storyline, unforgiving monochrome drawing the reader into the inky murkiness of Lapham's world with all its moral ambiguity, half-truths and downright lies. To describe this simply as a crime comic does it a great disservice, as do perpetual comparisons to Frank Miller, whose fetishised pulp pastiche **Sin City** lacks the subtlety of Lapham's work. But Lapham's great skill is to render ugly, flawed, often deceitful characters with such love and care as to make the reader like them despite (or perhaps because of) their faults.

The Verdict: An unrelenting tale of love, murders and desperately wrong choices that is as compelling as it is bleak. (RC)

Opposable Thumbs #1

Alternative Comics

By Dean Haspiel

There's a tendency for autobiographical comics to be understated and low-key, and some would say that's a part of their charm. On the back page of **Opposable Thumbs**, creator Haspiel claims his work is "semi-autobiographical", which might be a roundabout way of saying "The best bits were made up". As the six strips in this collection range from a treatise on scar-collecting to drug-fuelled kung-fu, by way of the rigours of flat-sharing with other males (and their buttocks) and using your neighbour's flight down your staircase as an inspiration for painting, one can only wonder,

Hopeless Savages #1

Oni Press

By Jen Van Meter, Christine Norrie and Chynna Clugston-Major

Hopeless Savages
"OPEN HOUSE" Part Five
What's the matter Buggle?
If you tell the others Arsenal might feel bad.
And Rat and Twitch'll call me a poseur and a dirt-bag.
That went well.

And Watson (**Breakfast After Noon**) and Chynna Clugston-Major (**Blue Monday**) are two of the American indie scene's brightest stars at the moment, so their involvement in this four-issue series should be enough to guarantee its quality, right? Well, I'm sure that was the plan. Unfortunately, Watson's lovely Union Jack cover and Clugston-Major's six pages of interior art aside, this is a disappointing debut issue.

The first problem is trying to work out exactly where this tale of latter day punk rockers is actually set. The Hopeless Savage family all talk fluent Mockney ("Dya cohear sumfin, luv?"), have UK road signs proudly displayed on their walls, and one of them is even named Arsenal, after the north London football club. But their environment seems American – from the wide and leafy suburban avenues, to girls with names like Tiffany, and guys that finish every sentence with the word "dude". I say "seems" as it's never made especially clear what the set-up is here. Are they a bunch of Brits living in the US? An American family who have adopted British mores and accents (like Madonna), or something different again? The fact that this isn't made explicit is frustrating and distracting. It also means that the book misses the chance to have the kind of fun that Clugston-Major has with the US/UK culture clash in **Blue Monday**, and that Watson has begun exploring in **Slow News Day**. In fact, the characters in **Hopeless Savages** inhabit a rather grey Anglo-Yank world, which possesses none of either culture's eccentricities or joie de vivre.

Meanwhile, Jen Van Meter's story does a decent job of introducing the book's main characters but it's a shame that she's had to graft on a lame kidnap plot to lend proceedings some drama. Surely there's enough interesting material to be mined from a punk rock family living in modern times, with names such as Pat, Zero and Twitch, without recourse to hackneyed story devices straight out of a TV detective show? Some of the best scenes in Jaime Hernandez's **Maghanics** series in **Love & Rockets** (which is clearly an inspiration here) involved little more than Maggie, Hopey and their rich supporting cast talking and hanging out – the characters were so strong and well defined that they often didn't need anything even resembling a plot to raise its unwelcome head above the parapet. Chynna Clugston-Major achieves a similar feat on **Blue Monday**, keeping her plots small and personal, leaving oodles of space to explore her characters and their fascinating mish-mash world of high-school hi-jinks and deft '80s Brit-pop.

On the subject of Clugston-Major, what a pity that her schedule is only allowing her to produce a six-page flashback sequence in each of this series' four issues. That isn't to say Christine Norrie's work (which accounts for the other 18 story pages here) is below par, it certainly isn't, but neither does her more naturalistic style mesh particularly well with the **Blue Monday** artist's manga-influenced explosion of pixie-ish faces and intricately detailed panels. Like Patti Smith joining Destiny's Child, it just doesn't look right somehow.

The Verdict: Despite the strength of the concept and the range of talent on display between its pages, Hopeless Savages is considerably less than the sum of its parts. (AW)

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THE VERDICT

therefore, how much of Hapid's comic is actually true. God help him if it is . .

Opposable Thumbs is, however, wonderfully entertaining, told with clear, expressive artwork and a flair for ribaldry that easily outdoes Kevin Smith. The pacing of each tale is perfect and his panel layout, particularly, is constantly inventive. This is solid, professional art (similar to David Lapham and Evan Dorkin), with an exaggerated realism that leaps off the page. And it all works in the service of the script perfectly.

The Verdict: A personal, hilarious and well-told comic, if not quite "slice-of-life". But when comics are as funny and sharp as this, does it matter if they're true? (AC)

Planetary #15

Wildstorm

By Warren Ellis and John Cassaday

With Snow returned to his position of Planetary boss and his memories returning, the focus of the series now swings away from the fanciful reinterpretations of pop culture concepts in the opening issues to the darker subject of the Four, the series' dark reflection of the Fantastic Four.

Ellis has slowly been increasing the tension with hints about this group and here he mixes in Aboriginal creation myth with the opening shots of the newly revived Planetary/ Four conflict. Without turning one of the lead characters into a hard-living cynic as usual, Ellis shows he can write some excellent stories based on simple but brilliant "What If?" concepts.

The Verdict: A slightly different thread for the series, but worth the extended wait as it's still as good as ever. (NL)

Powers #13

Image Comics

By Brian Michael Bendis and Michael Avon Oeming

When I flicked through this at the comic shop I thought it looked clever. You see the whole issue is presented as a **National Enquirer**-style tabloid, with a little bit of comic strip at the back. You, the reader, get to read most of this paper – based around the cult of celebrity surrounding superheroes – as the character in the story is reading it and then you are moved out into the traditional reading style just as said character reads rather badly to what she has just read. It would have been perfect if it had finished one page earlier, with the clue as to the possible identity of this woman remaining subtle, rather than the ham-fisted final page bludgeoning the reader over the head with it. We may all be reading comics but we're not entirely without our wits.

This is what Bendis was on about when he mentioned a new letterer – the legendary Ken Bruzenak – was to be given a workout. There is a *lot* of lettering in this issue, in many differing fonts and styles, covering headlines, news articles and advertisements (speaking of which, make sure you check out the ad for **Hammer Of The Gods**. Clever, eh?). Hiring a proofreader might be an idea, though.

You could condense this issue down to maybe a page of traditional comic book or one sentence of good old-fashioned prose. But that would miss the point of the exercise; namely to make you involved in the story as a participant rather than as the reader. This character is new to us and, instead of interrupting the story to introduce us to her, Bendis puts us in her shoes for a while. We read what she reads, we see how she reads and then we are allowed to see what part she plays in the ongoing story.

And Oeming gets an issue where he doesn't have to draw those itty-bitty little panels all the time.

The Verdict: A clever technical exercise, somewhat at the expense of the story, but certainly involving and, on the whole, successful. (AC)

New X-Men #114-116

Marvel; By Grant Morrison and Frank Quitely

Well, Morrison's done exactly what he promised to do. He's given the boring old X-Men a damn good shake and it's only taken him three issues and one story arc – *E Is For Extinction* – to do it. In the space of barely 60 pages the former **JLA**, **Animal Man** and **Doom Patrol** scribe has killed off half the mutant population on earth (including the team's oldest, bitterest foe), made killers of the X-Men's two most senior members (changing one of them forever), re-introduced Emma Frost, giving her new powers to boot, and mutated Hank McCoy into a reasonable, albeit blue, facsimile of his namesake from the old *Beauty and The Beast* TV show. And, apart from one minor reservation (which I'll get to in a bit), it's all been terrific fun.

You might not know it from some of his rather over-cooked work on **The Invisibles** but Morrison is clearly aware that more often than not the best stories are the simplest ones. So, even though *E Is For Extinction* deals in high drama, myriad plot twists and some serious character revelations, at no stage does it get bogged down with over complicated plot expositions, angst-ridden chest beating or pseudo-scientific gobbledygook. In other words, it's like no X-Men story for, ohh, eons. Instead, this is efficient, pacy, perfectly linear storytelling that goes for the jugular right from the get-go, ultimately unfolding into the kind of *stumm und drang* epic that Morrison revelled in on **JLA**.

Despite it's epic scope, one gets the distinct impression that *E Is For Extinction* is in fact little more than a prologue, a juicy taster of the serious action and Big Themes yet to be explored as Morrison really begins to put his pedal to the metal. Each of his six main characters – Wolverine, Jean Grey, Cyclops, Professor X, Emma Frost and the Beast – has been seriously impacted by the events of this story and its attendant sub plots. As a result the rather tired Logan/ Summers/ Grey triangle is set to be given a much-needed boot up the backside by the arrival of Frost, all heaving cleavage and haughty Englishness, while the transformation of Hank McCoy, and Frost's new powers, have the words 'Major Storyline' stamped all over them.

It's Xavier that is likely to become the main focus of **New X-Men** in the coming months, though. The events of *E Is For Extinction* have turned his life and morality upside down, prompting him to question whether his own brand of "X-liberalism" has any kind of purpose or future in light of the mutant genocide. His proclamation, "I won't allow any more mutants to die. Things must change now," is at once uplifting and chilling, the story's denouement suggesting we're going to have to get used to a somewhat more intense, less compromising Xavier than we've been used to.

Despite the story's somber tone, Morrison can't resist the occasional touch of black comedy (Beast holding the skull of a dead mutant in his paw Hamlet-style, and saying, "I don't know how to break this to you, but your dating days may be over, my friend"), and there's also a certain cattiness about the title – *E Is For Extinction* – suggesting that maybe, just maybe, he's having a quiet little dig at what has gone before; the writers that couldn't, the interminable plots and stupid characters. It's Morrison's way of saying, "All that nonsense ends here, enjoy!"

The only potential stumbling block lies in how far the writer decides to take the team's hard new edge, which at its most extreme could even see them abandoning their integrationist stance on mutant/ human relations. Let's just hope we don't end up with a mutant version of **The Authority**, especially as that book's central premise (that superheroes have some kind of God-given right to lord it over the rest of us) seems to have infected quite a few team titles of late, most particularly **The Avengers**, the upcoming **Defenders** revamp and the recently announced **Ultimates** series. In other words, sour-faced, cynical superhero teams are currently ten-a-penny, and we need another one like we need a sulphuric acid enema.

The Verdict: E Is For Excellent! (AW)

Savage Dragon #88

By Erik Larsen

Image

If you haven't read Erik Larsen's every-issue-is-accessible-to-new-readers masterpiece yet, just remember that it's never too late to start.

It's incredible to think that this comic is even more fast moving now than before. Larsen decided to wipe away 75 issues of continuity and start again, but it is. This issue is for everyone who'll never get sick of Kirby's **New Gods** and who's dared to wish for a single time when the Watcher says, "I must not interfere . . " without continuing, "Oh go on then, just this once."

The Verdict: Buy Larsen, or I will smash, and you really wouldn't like me when I'm angry. (JC)

Spider-Man: Tangled Web #5

Marvel

By Peter Milligan & Duncan Fegredo

Daniel Keyes's Nebula Award-winning short story **Flowers for Algernon** – filmed as both *Charly* (winning star Cliff Robertson an Oscar) and *Flowers For Algernon* (starring the under-rated Matthew Modine) – told the story of Charlie Gordon, whose low IQ is artificially raised to genius level in a scientific experiment.

Flowers For Rhino neatly eschews all the subtlety and introspection of that source material and gives us an issue of the Rhino pissing and moaning about being stuck in an irremovable and indestructible rhino suit, whilst fighting Spider-Man, running through walls and

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falling for a dame who will never love him, before submitting himself for a similar brain-enhancing procedure.

Milligan used to be one of those writers whose work – on titles like **Enigma** and **Shade The Changing Man** – made reading comics such a pleasure. *Flowers For Rhino* falls short of that by some margin. The script is bereft of any real invention, preferring to waste time establishing pathos for a villain whose very lameness would seem to take that for granted. He's the Rhino, he's big, stupid and unloved, this we know. It's not that this issue is badly paced, because it moves along at a fair clip, but this is only a two-parter and we've barely got started.

Fegredo's art is, as ever, a joy. His wonderfully sketchy, yet solid, backgrounds, emotive facial expressions and vividly dynamic camera angles are a pleasure. His Spider-Man has the chunky skinniness of Sal Buscema's or Romita Jr.'s renditions and his Rhino is variously imposing and pathetic, according to the script's demands.

The Verdict: This is by-the-numbers comic writing, albeit enlivened by great art. (AC)

The Titans #32

DC Comics

By Jay Faerber and Mike Collins

The gentle but engaging soap that is **The Titans** continues with another issue in the saga of the mysterious children who turned up a few issues ago and decided to make Titans Tower their home. They're small, they're recute, they're incredibly powerful and the government wants them back.

"Super powered kids on the run from the fascist authorities" isn't the most original plotline in the universe, but then the ones in **Titans** never are. But somehow it always fits together just right, and this is no exception. If you're more interested in character development and interation than big fist fights, you could do much worse than give this a go.

The Verdict: Light, fun superhero fare. And it gives you another chance to see Dick Grayson in tight black leather every month! (JC)

Vampirella #1

Harris Comics

By Mark Millar and Mike Mayhew

Another relaunch for the Harris Comics figurehead. But those expecting Ultimate Vampirella will be disappointed. Issue one treats us to Anne Rice-reading rednecks and a government agent who insists on making it obvious she's wearing stockings. We also discover that Vampirella has gone from nightwalker to streetwalker in a bid to trap vampires in local bars, whilst two members of the Daisy Duke fan dub stage a Russ Meyer inspired jailbreak.

The most disappointing aspect here is Vampirella's seeming lack of humanity, which always set her apart from those she hunted – the gentle, caring flip side of the coin, against her savage, brutal side.

On the plus side, Mayhew's art is nothing short of stunning, but the colouring looks quite heavy, especially after seeing the slick pencils of the **Giant Sized Ashcan Edition** and the black and white photograph-style art on page ten of this issue. Despite her 32 years, Mayhew has taken a decade off 'Rella - let's just hope Millar remembers that there's a lot of character hidden under that skimpy outfit.

The Verdict: A promising re-launch artistically, with Mike Mayhew on top form. Millar needs to move up a gear for issue #2, though. (DB)

ZINE SEEN

Angel Nebula #9

75p from Tony McGee, 143 Meldon Drive, Bilston, West Midlands, WV14 8BE, UK

If you've never read an issue of Tony McGee's **Angel Nebula**, *don't* send for this last one. Instead, send for all nine issues and read not only a complex and imaginative sci-fi narrative, but also a wonderfully human story of love, friendship and dreams both crushed and realised. It's hardly unusual to find a sci-fi story about genetic engineering and life on Mars. It's much rarer to find such a story with everyday characters – the sort of people you normally meet only in 'slice-of-life' books, made all the more attractive through an art style that stays cute without ever getting cutesy.

The Verdict: A successful melding of hi-concept sci-fi with low rent characters. (RH)

Classic Comix #1

£2 from Ben Hurt, 27a Duke Street, Preston PR1 4HP, UK

Ben Hurt and Robyn Talbot's superhero parody series rises above the usual standard for this kind of thing by treating super-heroics in general as something inherently ridiculous.

It's all done with considerable affection, and there are even a couple of specific parodies (of inhabitants of Gallifrey and Asgard), which suggest a rather detailed knowledge of the source material. But punches are not pulled: if you're objective enough to look at superhero comics and think that they're all rather silly, then you'll love this. If you still take the genre seriously, forget it.

The Verdict: A raw but exhilarating genre satire. (MK)

Coda

From Clive Nolan, 117 Shakespeare Rd, Herne Hill, London SE24 0PY, UK

That this is creator Clive Nolan's comics debut is surprising. Why surprising? Because it is so accomplished. From the first glance the reader is immediately struck by his luscious artwork. Comparisons with Dave McKean or **Big Numbers**-era Bill Sienkiewicz are unavoidable, and not entirely fair. After all, Nolan isn't some mere copyist, his own experimental steps into the chronically under-explored area of photo-realist comics being just that – his own.

But beyond the artwork lies a well-stocked bar of sharp, yet playful stories. *Slapstick* sees the ghost of Oliver Hardy having his lofty pretensions punctured by one of the oldest gags in the book, while *If This Was Heaven, Then That Would Be Hell* is a neat parable which advises caution when faced with someone who claims they know how to make you a god.

While many self-published titles are often let down by poor production standards, **Coda** manages to give the art the print quality it deserves. There is a palpable sense of magic about this comic.

The Verdict: Gorgeous visuals and writing that rewards repeated readings mark Coda out as a comic that demands attention. (RC)

Frank N. Bear

£2.50 from Andrew Bloor, 170 Forrister Street, Meir Hay, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs ST3 5XF, UK

This is a highly engaging comic. Bloor uses a lot of very solid, powerfully brushed blacks which add weight to a very clean, professional cartooning style and also add some solidity to a fairly lightweight tale of a misfit boy inventor who decides to make his "best friend" able to talk. The very strong art and some fluent scripting make this an ideal comic for young children, but one which will also raise a chuckle in most adults.

The Verdict: The small press' gain is the mainstream weeklies' loss. (MK)

The Kaboom Review #8

Free, via www.thekaboomreview.co.uk

No spoiler warnings, hermaphroditic porn, and the information that ALEXANDER ROSS is an anagram of NO SEX LAD ARSE. Where else but the unique dark Urine that is **The Kaboom Review**?

Making full use of the web's endless resources for the most improper of purposes, namely a pornographic-laden humour that my religious background folk would not approve of, it is peppered throughout with amusing little anecdotes and personal reflections. Peppered, salted, spiced, curried; such is the TKR treatment.

The Verdict: This makes me laugh when I'm sad, this is an institution. Mmm, institutions... (AL)

The Lupus

70p from The Oakes Brothers' Gems Publishing, 65 South Grove, Sale, Manchester M33 3AR

Ben Oakes', artist/writer of *Second hand Misery*, art style is simplistic, wooden, almost childlike yet conveys a lot of power, which is surprising because this main story just doesn't seem to fit in with the rest of the zine. Ben's story is full of allegory, sharp, almost painful observations and evokes the feeling of "yeah, I can relate to that". I didn't expect much entering into this - I was pleasantly fulfilled.

Presumably Ben's brother Tom, the writer of *Jonny Crucifix*, doesn't share half of his sibling's ability. *Crucifix* is, I believe, designed to be a piss-take; instead it falls flat on a number of counts, lacking subtlety being the biggest. Also it appears to be a reprint, having appeared originally in something called **15 Nuns**. It should have stayed with the sisters...

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The Verdict: actually worth buying for Secondhand Misery alone. I can think of many people who could read it and know exactly what the author is going on about. The colour cover's nice as well! (DRB)

Old Newts #1

£1 from Richard J. Smith, 39 Lower Unwin Street, Penistone, Sheffield S36 6LX, UK

Richard Smith's work has been turning up a lot lately, both in his own excellent series **Chroma** and in the pages of Lee Davis's **Monda**. It should really be turning up in **The Beano** by now, since Smith has the same kind of iconodasm, wild visual humour and skill in pacing gags with which Leo Baxendale and Ken Reid once enlivened the DC Thomson comics – but Thomson plays it safer these days. This particular series contains reprints of fanzine strips from six years ago, when his style was less evolved, but they're still worth reading; that visual style and dry sense of humour were already in place back then.

The Verdict: Old wine in a new bottle, but it's a decent vintage. (MK)

The O Man #11

£1.50 from Martin Eden, 35 Woodbury Street, Tooting, London, SW17 9RP

"Own Worst Enemy" lines up the spotlight on spooky nemesis Anathema, she of strimmers, scissors and knives, who wanders in and out of the lives of The O Man. Mart Eden revels in his Gaiman influence, for sheer bloody horror, for modesty, and for sharp, essential dialogue. Visually, parallel lines and crafted juxtaposed lines, crease-creating, reveal a steady and confident hand. There's an envelope about here somewhere, isn't there?

The Verdict: A decidedly Morrison-esque reality bender with some wonderfully functioning layouts. (AL)

Pulp Kitchen #4

£2.50 from Pulp Kitchen, Hall Studios, 4 Wellington Fields, Wavertree, Liverpool, England, L15 0EL

Sixty pages, fifteen strips and twenty or so creators. Big Summer Fun? Many of the strips don't work because of their ongoing irregular nature. Even those with well designed sets and costume are just not of enough consequence to stand time's interrogation. Highlights include Nathan Webb, a studious artist of technical mind who crafts a tale about a dancer, and the wonderful *Favourite Crayon Stories* by Bear. These, I declare, buzz with youth energy. Otherwise, I won't mention any names but there is a lot of hackwork, tribute gone wrong, in here, though the two colour covers are wonderful and the price quite reasonable.

The Verdict: Some effortless cartooning, on the boil, and real gems – but this anthology offers choice diluted. (AL)

The Plot Thickens

By Gavin Burrows and James Parker

£1.25 from Armchair Comics, 37 Hollingbury Park Avenue, Brighton BN1 7JG, UK

A cheery little booklet in the postcard format, in which those devilish cads Burrows and Parker bring an upper crust adventurer, the type who populated Buchan's Runagates Club, face to face with the real consequences of running around the world laughtering foreign devils. Burrows scripts with wit, Parker draws with dash, and at the end of it all another Establishment myth is stylishly left in tattered shreds.

The Verdict: It's a bad show, but these chaps have done the decent thing by it. (MK)

Talamander #7

£1.25 from Tim Brown, 22 Woodborough Drive, Winscombe, Somerset, BS25 1HB

Rik Hoskin turns in a pop comic epic in the conclusion to the 'Hymn Taking' trilogy, latest part of the long-running saga of Brin, 200 year old elf of Talamander. This illuminated booklet joins together Tim Brown's two opposing styles, the freehand minimalist approach found in the opinionated and funny **Part-Time Lights** with **Talamander**'s arranged-by-graft scenes of fine attention. Thus high speed shaping meets precision fitting. Rushed, but with the dassiness that intention drives, who could blame him?

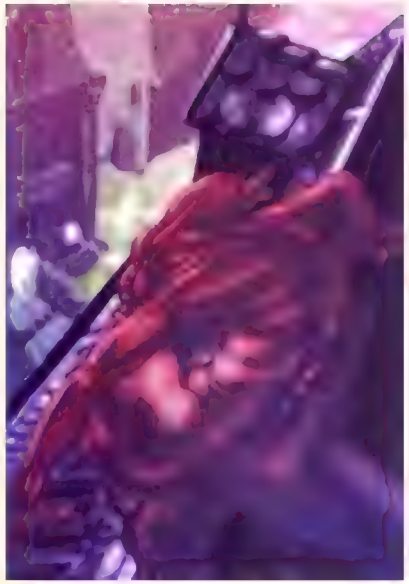
The Verdict: Wonderful landscape and portraits booklet – a magical yet dashing blockbuster element. (AL)

Verhexed

By Maximilian Berger

www.geocities.com/verhexed

e-mail: verhexed@yahoo.de



Most British small press creators tend to opt for low-cost printing or photocopying on standard white paper, bound in stapled pamphlets; on the European mainland things are different, with format and presentation being considered highly important. Thus it isn't necessarily a surprise to find that Viennese creator Max Berger's self-published **Verhexed** is a square-bound album on glossy, heavyweight paper, filled with full colour computer-treated paintings – but to British eyes it looks highly impressive before it's even read.

So, how well *does* it read? The English of the text is not entirely fluent, but it has a poetic style and weight which serve to counteract any linguistic infelicities, and even to enhance what is essentially a story of horror, demons and slaughter. The art's the thing, though. Echoes of Richard Corben abound – not of his recent, rather subdued work for the American mainstream but of the full on, painted lusciousness of **Den** – but Berger has integrated them into his own nerve-wracking, phantasmagoric style. The result is strong meat, not for the faint hearted, but offers due reward to those who dare.

The Verdict: A powerful, oddly beautiful and unsettling work. (MK)

Vogarth Colour Special

£2 from Ben Hunt, 27a Duke Street, Preston PR1 4HP, UK

It's been a few years since the demise of the regular **Vogarth** series, so those who enjoyed the tripped out, iconodastic adventures of Astro Punk and Katika will be delighted to see this lusious, beautifully coloured return to print.

The contents are much the same as they ever were - partying and mayhem in equal measure, all underpinned by a well-characterised relationship between hero and heroine, and Ben Hunt's cheerfully spiky art.

The Verdict: This old small press favourite is still full of life. (MK)

Get your zine seen! Produce a small press fanzine or comic? Then send it to Borderline and get some PR! Send to: Zine Scene, 45 Fullingdale Road, Northampton NN3 2PZ, England, with a return address and details of availability. Get your zine seen in Zine Scene!

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RAINEYWORLD CLASSIC

Paul Rainey's vision of comics in 2040 is held over for another month, so here's a classic Rainey view of Marvel's numero uno sidekick!

THE HULK.
I'M BORED HANGIN' WITH YOU MAN I'M OFF TO SEE CAPTAIN AMERICA AND BECOME HIS NEW PARTNER
YEAH? GO ON! SLING YER HOOK! IT'S YOUR FAULT I TURN INTO THE HULK IN THE FIRST PLACE!
CAPTAIN AMERICA.
I'LL BE HONOURED TO HAVE YOU AS MY NEW PARTNER. RICK ANY FRIEND OF THE HULK'S IS A FRIEND OF MINE
GROOVY
LATER.
SEE I'M BORED WITH BEING YOUR PARTNER MAN SO I'M GONNA HANG WITH THAT CAPTAIN MARVEL GUY
CAPTAIN MARVEL.
THE ARRANGEMENT IS YOU OCCUPY MY PLACE INSIDE THE NEGATIVE ZONE WHILE I OCCUPY YOUR'S ON EARTH TO FIGHT CRIME
RADICAL
LATER.
MAN THE NEGATIVE ZONE SUCKS! I'M GONNA GO SEE THE HULK
HULK.
GET LOST HUMAN!
ROBBIE WILLIAMS IS HULK'S PARTNER NOW!

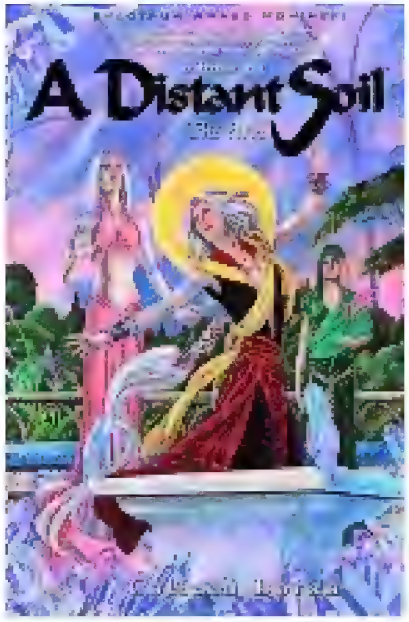
THE COLLECTED VERDICT

TRADE PAPERBACK REVIEWS

A Distant Soil Volume III: The Aria

Image

By Colleen Doran



In an industry where more and more storylines are being designed to fit into handy collections, whether the quality of the work calls for it or not, it comes as a relief to find one such edition that actually works better as a collection than as individual issues.

Creator Colleen Doran has allowed herself the luxury of telling her science-fantasy epic at the pace the story dictates, rather than worrying about page counts and story arcs. As a result, the reader is here thrown straight into the middle of the action, but this is nicely offset by a clear, concise summary of previous events.

The clean black and white artwork is exquisitely detailed with no unnecessary or wasteful lines. There is a mature and intelligent sophistication to the plot unseen elsewhere in comics today, and the sound characterisations, as well as Doran's keen ear for dialogue, result in truly distinct personalities. As yet sadly under-appreciated by a wider audience, this collection stands as a perfect example of the high quality of the writer/artist's work on the title.

The Verdict: Intricate plots peopled with fascinating characters make this a compelling and rewarding read. (NL)

Avengers Forever

By Kurt Busiek, Roger Stern and Carlos Pacheco

If only Marvel had not released a certain line of comics, this book could be described as 'Ultimate Avengers'. This is the Avengers concept taken to the ultimate level and at the time of publication was probably the best storyline Marvel had published in years. With the current renaissance at the House of Ideas, this series should be seen as the benchmark for quality, the target that the new talent should be trying to reach. Indeed, Kurt Busiek has taken up his own challenge with a stupendous run on the regular Avengers title, and Grant Morrison and J. Michael Straczynski are not far behind.

Busiek patently relishes the wealth of detail that has built up in the 38 years since the first issue of **The Avengers** hit the stands, and he utilises bits and pieces of this background to excellent effect in the monthly title. With this series, however, he and co-writer Roger Stern upped the ante and made use of pretty much the entirety of Avengers history.

A cynical reader might see this as merely an editorial exercise – a way of clearing up the tangled continuity of the Marvel Universe. In many ways it is just that, especially Chapter Eight, but it is also so much more.

As befits the sheer amount of background material being used, the scale of this adventure is truly epic. The survival of the human race is put up against the survival of long-time sidekick Rick Jones, and a specially selected team of Avengers (from various points in the team's history) is stuck in the middle. It is to Busiek and Stern's credit that they write a crisis story which, for once, genuinely feels like a crisis, and not just yet another obstacle for the heroes to overcome. The threat in this story feels real.

Carlos Pacheco, one of Marvel's finest artists, proves to be more than able to

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keep up with Busiek and Stern's extravagant writing, and although he struggles here and there to give the visuals the epic feel they need, the huge fights towards the end of the book are as good as any George Perez-drawn multi-combatant punch-up. His character drawing is exemplary and his panel compositions and page layouts are superb.

The flaws? Apart from the aforementioned ordinariness of some of the art, there are few flaws. The early "Avengers through time" segments (Chapters Four, Five and Six), although undeniably entertaining, seem a little extraneous, and Captain America's obligatory "justice!" speech towards the end is nothing but unnecessarily patriotic jingoism, especially considering the course of action the Avengers ultimately take.

These are but small flaws, however, and don't detract from the quality of the finished product – a grand, highly enjoyable adventure that Marvel should be proud of.

The Verdict: 'The Avengers' greatest moment in recent years, and much cheaper than the 500-odd back issues it uses as inspiration! (KG)

Eagle: The Making of an Asian-American President Book 2

Viz Communications

By Kaiji Kawaguchi

Kawaguchi's political epic continues apace as more is revealed about what drives Kenneth Yamada to become the first Asian-American President of the United States.

There's a nice balance of political material and character interaction here that is reminiscent of the US TV drama, *The West Wing*. There's certainly a firm focus on the struggle to gain political ground in order to be a viable candidate for the Presidency, but just as many pages are devoted to the relationships of Yamada's staff and family.

The artwork is not comparable to the more realistic style of Ryoichi Ikegami on **Sanctuary**, but it doesn't detract from the quality of the overall story, with the slightly caricatured style perfectly conveying the expressions and emotions found in the more tense and confrontational scenes.

The Verdict: If you're a fan of** The West Wing **you must read this book (KH)

Fantastic Four: Flesh & Stone

Marvel

By Carlos Pacheco, Rafael Marin, Jeph Loeb and Jesus Merino

After Chris Claremont's interminable run, Carlos Pacheco's **FF** *does* seem like a breath of fresh air. But in truth, there's nothing all *that* Fantastic here. The main plots are unspectacular villain-of-the-month affairs (although there's an intriguing background plot developing) and the scripting – at least until Jeph Loeb's arrival towards the end of this collection – is as unnecessarily verbose as Claremont's, though thankfully not as hollow.

Pacheco has a good handle on Marvel's first family, and his art is certainly the best these characters have seen since John Byrne's heyday (though the day-glo colouring might hurt more sensitive eyes). There're no massive Morrison-esque ideas or hipper-than-MTV Bendis dialogue – just a solid, no-frills superhero comic. Whether that's refreshing or dated . . is your decision.

Don't expect any DVD-style extras in the trade though, this is your basic strip-only edition without even full-page cover repros.

The Verdict: Turns out they do still write comics like the ones from when I was a lad . . good thing or bad? (RH)

Finder: Sin-Eater, Volume #1

Lightspeed Press

By Carla Speed McNeil

Finder is one of those stories that really only could be told in a self-published comic. To describe it as a mix of sci-fi, mysticism, dysfunctional families and talking animals doesn't even scratch the surface of this remarkable book.

The central plot concerns Jaeger, a Finder (something like an Indian scout or a detective), who spends a lot of his time in the semi-futuristic city of Anvard. He's the only real link between two halves of a broken family (not his own), his loyalties split between the mother and her fascinating daughters on one side, and the potentially dangerous father on the other. But **Finder** isn't a book of black and white good and evil, these characters are multi-layered, and Carla Speed McNeil forces us to confront complex moral questions about their relationships as we read.

Finder is every inch the definition of an adult comic – not because of the occasional flash of nudity, sex or bad language, but because of the issues it grapples with, the way it makes the reader think and feel. And that . . is but one aspect. **Finder** is also hilarious in places, with so much else going on that's often only revealed in the art (Scott McCloud meets Colleen Doran with splashes of Manga). It'd probably take an entire issue of **Borderline** to do this title justice . .

The Verdict: Full of ideas, three-dimensional characters and throw-away gags that reveal themselves to be so much more, there's not a panel wasted in this fascinating, thought-provoking book. (RH)

Gash

Slab-O-Concrete

By Soren G Mosdal

This little book is a triumph of advertising design; a decent cover picture on a strange brown background and back cover blurb promising "sublime, literary eroticism", and all on quality paper. Sadly, what you get inside is puerile, half-witted ramblings of the worst sort, peppered with needlessly foul dialogue and more spelling and grammatical mistakes than I have ever seen in any other professionally produced publication. This is exactly the sort of crap that makes it difficult to give the small or indie press a fair go and take a chance on some of their output.

Which is a shame, because Mosdal draws fairly well, combining McKean, McKeever and Columbia into a style that should be his own but, somehow, isn't. There are still some panels I can't quite make head nor tail of, but I don't think I'm missing out on much.

And then, in the middle of the book, there is a decent story. Where the art isn't trying so hard to be someone else's and the story isn't trying desperately to shock the reader. It's just a little 'slice-of-life' piece that, in a mixed anthology, might leave you with the impression that Mosdal was worth looking out for. But he's not.

The Verdict: Ridiculous, illiterate and numb; this is the sort of misanthropic pretension that should be, like its progenitor, ignored. (AC)

Grickle

Alternative Comics

By Graham Annable

It's virtually axiomatic that there are scores of fine cartoonists working in the US animation industry, where they may labour in near anonymity but are assured of steady work and, often, better pay than they could obtain working on comics. We know this because of the number of comics artists who've gone into animation over the years – but we rarely get the chance to see what regular animators can do if they try their hands at comics. And if any of the others are as good as LucasArts designer Graham Annable, then the world of

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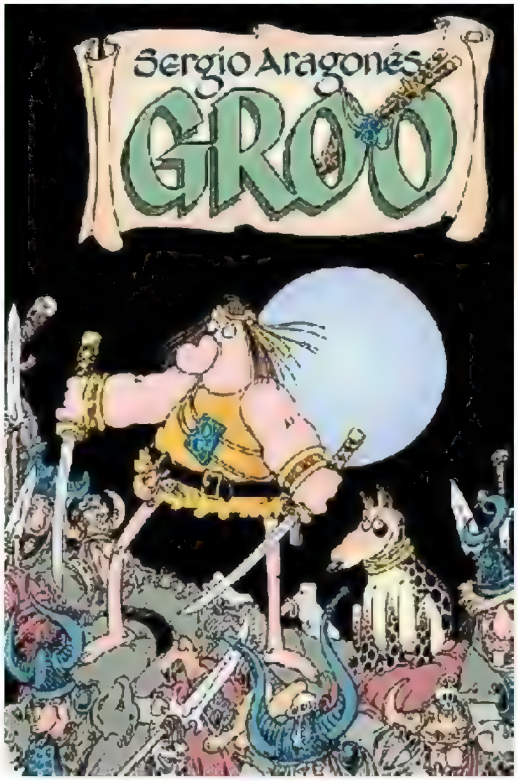
animation must harbour a wealth of talent which the comics industry could sorely do with.

Amable knows how to tell a story – it's as simple as that. This volume is filled with deceptively simple black and white cartooning, divided into anecdotes which, for the most part, deal with human foibles or feelings; there's little action here, and if there's adventure then it's the kind that occurs in the small discoveries and realizations that fill everyday life. In many hands such mundane material might be too stodgy, too serious, but Amable keeps his anecdotes smartly paced, moving the eye swiftly from panel to panel, leaving the reader to pause and ponder only at the end of each section. It's a daring technique, one which only a talented storyteller could pull off – and if there are more animators who can do it as ably as Amable does in Gridkle, then I hope one day they too may produce comics as fine as this.

The Verdict: Simple, funny, thought provoking, heart warming – first rate comics! (MK)



The Groo Library

Dark Horse

By Sergio Aragonés and Mark Evanier

If you've read **Groo** before, nothing in this review will influence your decision whether to buy **The Groo Library**. Either you get the gag(s?) or you don't.

So for those new to **Groo**, here's a collection of four more from the early '90s Epic series, featuring the hapless barbarian (Conan crossed with Homer Simpson), his faithful companion Rufferto, and the witches, warriors, sages and minstrels they meet in their wanderings.

It's packed with running jokes, catchphrases, sharp one-liners, and of course the unique cartooning of Sergio Aragonés with its bulging panels of gurn-worthy expressions and lavishly detailed comedy backgrounds.

As a bonus, this edition's largely about Rufferto – surely the sweetest cartoon pooch ever invented. Well, he could kick Snoopy's butt any day...

The Verdict: Who is more foolish, the fool or the idiot who reads about the fool? (RH)

The Invisibles: Entropy In The UK

Vertigo

By Grant Morrison, Phil Jimenez, Steve Yeowell and others

There's a scene towards the beginning of this latest **Invisibles** collection that sums the book up perfectly. Sir Miles is torturing King Mob, using only the alphabet, trying to crack the Invisibles' secrets. Mid-interrogation, Miles and his assistant break for a cup of tea and a Fruit Club biscuit, while a '70s sitcom tea-lady offers to microwave them (and King Mob if he wants one) a nice bacon roll. After that, it's straight back to the torture – with Key 17 and the Necrotising Fasciitis Bacteria. It's that mix of counter-culture and pop-culture which makes **The Invisibles** so enjoyable. It's the place where Robert Anton Wilson meets *The Prisoner*; where a video tape containing bizarre human-alien pornography is substituted for an old *Father Ted* episode by two cops straight out of *The Sweeney*; where black trains ship New York rappers and other "subversives" away to sinister detention camps. And it's all written with such conviction that we find ourselves praying it's only fiction.

The Verdict: Step inside Grant Morrison's

THE CLASSIC TPBK REVIEW

*Every month **Borderline** recommends top quality collected editions from the recent – or not so recent – past. This month Death's Head*

Death's Head: The Body In Question

By Simon Furman and Geoff Senior – Published by Marvel (UK) in October 1990

Death's Head, the robotic bounty hunter with a businessman's attitude, started off as a guest-star in Marvel UK's **Transformers** comic, before spinning off and making guest appearances in various Marvel UK and US titles, and finally settling down into his own series. This trade, reprinting portions of issues 13 to 20 of Marvel UK's anthology title **Strip**, takes place towards the end of that series, and concerns the then unknown origin of the character. The story is essentially one of a journey of discovery, as Death's Head not only discovers his physical origins, but also confirms, in a more existential way, his identity. Always the businessman, he begins to suspect, to his disgust, that he is beginning to enjoy killing more than profit.

No writer captured the character's unique dry humour quite like his creator, Simon Furman, and there never was a better Death's Head artist than Geoff Senior (although **JLA**'s Bryan Hitch comes close). Freed from the constraints of licensed properties, Furman gives the story a mature edge as he investigates themes of identity, family and revenge.

Senior, for his part, produces truly beautiful art, whilst maintaining his usual dynamic, energetic, almost primal style. The true highlight of this book, though, is Death's Head himself. He is one of Marvel's most under-appreciated and criminally under-used characters, and Furman uses the extended length of this story to fully explore the character, and just as importantly, to enjoy him.

For newcomers to Death's Head, this is an excellent introduction to the character, and for existing fans, it offers probably the best Death's Head story ever created. For fans of Furman and Senior, this book contains some of their finest work to date.

The Verdict: The book has long been out of print, but if you can find it, it is an essential read. (KG)

*A summary of Death's Head's appearances in various Marvel comics can be found at: www.homeusers.prestel.co.uk/primus/deathshead.htm

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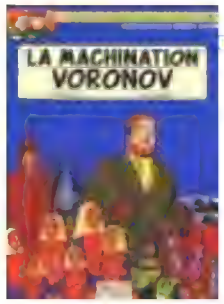
mind, where the familiar becomes frightening. (RH)

La Machination Voronov

Editions Blake et Mortimer

By Yves Sente and André Juilliard

Can a classic series by a single writer/artist ever be satisfactorily revived? In the Anglophone world of company-owned, team-created comics it isn't a question which generally has to be asked, let alone answered. But *Blake et Mortimer* was so distinctively the creation of Edgar P. Jacobs that half of the reason for looking at this, the second of the post-Jacobs albums, has to be to see how well it compares with the original; taking it on its own terms is really not an option.



And, as with Van Hamme and Benoit's **L'Affaire Francis Blake**, it quickly becomes clear that **La Machination Voronov** is not so much a continuation as it is homage to the peak years of the series. Like Benoit before him, Juilliard ignores the looser, lighter style of the later Jacobs albums and opts instead for a close imitation of the look of **La Marque Jaune** and **L'Énigme de L'Atlantide**, the classics of the 1950s. Sente's scenario is set during the late 1950s so it's a logical move, but it isn't a progression. Nothing new is being attempted here.

Still, Juilliard does a fine job of an almost impossible task, failing only to capture Mortimer's face adequately, always the most expressive and trickiest of Jacobs's character designs. Together, he and Sente provide an adequate treat for those who must have more of *Blake et Mortimer*; even if, like Van Hamme and Benoit, they capture the look and the realism of Jacobs's art but either evade or are evaded by that sense of the fantastic which always pervaded his work. Ultimately this is solidly crafted, enjoyable, better even than Jacobs at his weakest – but the spark of the man at his best is notably absent.

The Verdict: Only to be read as a supplement to the original series. (MK)

Neon Genesis Evangelion: Special Collectors Edition Volume 1

Viz Communications

By Yoshiyuki Sadamoto

Giant robots fighting against alien invaders. You couldn't ask for anything better, could you? Actually, you could, you could ask for believable characters, personal and political struggles, compassion and humour as well. **Neon Genesis Evangelion** provides the lot... in spades.

This first volume follows Shinji Ikari as he is first introduced to the organisation NERV, and the giant Evangelion (Eva) robot he is required to pilot. Required isn't the right word, he is coerced into it by his father – a man who abandoned him many years before, and who views him more as a tool to operate the Eva, rather than a son. Once Shinji's compassion forces him to enter the pilot seat all hell breaks loose as he faces off against an Angel – a monstrous creature capable of vast amounts of destruction. Nearly killed in this first confrontation he is saved by sheer will, a will that causes the Eva to go out of control, attacking the Angel with incredible ferocity.

Sadamoto's artwork is superb, conveying the sheer speed and action of the fight scenes, whilst also showing a wide range of expressions in the key characters, by varying his style to suit each panel – from basic use of line, through more complex inked shading, on to heavy use of screen tone, and even several pages of painted artwork – which are unfortunately spoilt by the black and white printing.

The Verdict: The beginning of one of the best giant robot comics available in English – action, drama, humanity, it has it all, enjoy. (KH)

Pistolwhip

Top Shelf

By Jason Hall and Matt Kindt

The book is packaged like an old wireless radio, and comes complete with an introduction written by Chris Staros in the form of an "instructions manual". The tale within is framed in instalments just like a radio drama serial.

Like many decent noir tales – both versions of the movie *D.O.A.* being fine examples – we start at the end here, and the writers reconstruct the events that lead up to the first scenes. However, each chapter also deconstructs the members of the ensemble cast, in the way that different actors would play different roles as the radio serials moved on to a different story.

There are some excellent touches, such as the distorted perspective when one of the characters starts to feel woozy. In the first episode, we are introduced to our femme fatale, our patsy and our hard-boiled detective (who is actually a bell-hop with ambitions of being a detective). And there

is the mysterious Mr Pretzel, who seems to be in control of rather more of the story than he would like the others to know.

When the chapter ends, events are reduced to a radio script – perhaps the one that Mr. Pretzel is working on?

With the beginning of each new "episode" we are taken back to previous events from the perspective of each of the characters. Some details change quite subtly, but we can piece together the story leading to the climax. We learn the back-stories of the cast: How Mitch Pistolwhip became a PI, how Mr. Vogel arrived in the USA with no New Ideas, how Charlie Mirks became a femme fatale – and how fact and fiction became twisted by the Human Pretzel. Each of the four episodes stand as intriguing stories on their own, but are twisted like pretzel dough into the greater whole of the story.

The narrative contortions (similar, if you will, to *Pulp Fiction*) are handled very well, and are totally in keeping with the genre. The simplistic cartoony style conveys the drama of the story well, without complicating matters.

The Verdict: Newcomers Hall & Kindt are transmitting loud and clear. A fine example of pulp noir in any medium. (AB)

BL

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NET VERDICT

Amazing Spider-man Gallery

www.samuby.com

This is not a gallery at all, rather a very well researched and constructed site, providing a great deal of information on the comicbook exploits of Spider-Man.

The site uses a lot of graphics, including a very attractive wallpaper made up of comic pages, and as a result can be quite slow. However, it is worth persevering, as there's a mine of information here to be absorbed.

One of the highlights is a rundown of the heroes and villains that populate Spidey's world. This is quite detailed, although there are notable omissions (not every incarnation of the Green Goblin is mentioned, for instance). Another strong point is the section containing plot summaries. Although confined to storylines, rather than individual issues, this is a well-written section, with the summary of the infamous Clone Saga being particularly entertaining.

The subject matter could be expanded to include Spider-Man's adventures outside comics, and perhaps there's a need for a general tidy-up, but given the overall quality of the site, these criticisms seem churlish.

The Verdict: If you want to know anything about Spidey comics, then there are few sites better than this little gem (KG)

Cool Beans World

www.coolbeansworld.com

A hugely impressive, enormously ambitious site, featuring brand new and totally exclusive work by the likes of Pat Mills, Ian Edginton, John Bolton, Disraeli and Simon Davis.

Although many of the current strips and animations have a clear horror influence, there's still a great deal of variety here. **The Twisted Mind Of Dr. Krieger**, written by Pat Mills, is a frequently hilarious trawl through the mad scientist archetype, while Edginton's **Dark Frankenstein** is a fine piece of modern gothic storytelling enlivened by Simon Davis's menacing art. Add to those Nick Percival's **Saintly**, a fully animated tale of demons invading a small southern town, and Edginton and Disraeli's dark fairy story, **Kingdom Of The Wicked**, and you've got an on-line anthology right up there with the very best of its printed counterparts.

As well as some fine strips, **Cool Beans World** also offers screensavers, desktops, postcards, games, an on-line magazine (**Cool Bean Zine**), a shop, a place for aspiring artists to display their work, message boards and loads more besides, making this a truly interactive on-line experience.

There is, of course, a catch. Access to the abundance of material featured here isn't free. But at a little under £20 for a full year's subscription, it's unlikely anyone's going to be questioning **CBW**'s value for money credentials in the near future, especially with more exclusive work on the way from the likes of Ann Nocenti, Charlie Adlard, John Bolton and Kevin Eastman, plus the impending return of Mills and Kevin O'Neill's **Marshal Law**.

The Verdict: The high quality of its contributors and the dizzying depth of its content make CBW the best comics site on the web. Welcome to the future. (AW)

The Dave Stevens website

www.davestevens.com/html/main.html

One of comics' most respected artists gets a new website, laid out in mock 1930s Art Deco style to reflect Stevens's own influences. Here you'll find a checklist of the *Rocketeer* creator's work, listed in publisher order, and by clicking onto a title you are able to access a thumbnail of its art. Frustratingly, though, only a small number of these thumbnails can be enlarged, although there is a pledge that more artwork will soon be added.

There is little in the way of news, features or links, which again limits the site's appeal.

The Verdict: Although there is little of note at present, this site should become promising once more artwork is accessible. (NL)

Ditko Locked Up

http://interlog.com/~ditko37/ditko.html

One for the veteran browsers among us and significantly updated since I reviewed it in a previous life. Interesting new additions include Ditko's Visual Templates, which enables you to see how the artist swiped himself when designing characters such as Peter Parker, Aunt May and The Lizard (although the last two might well just be interchangeable anyway). You can also follow The Ditko Influence to see who style themselves on our right-wing friend, at least artistically.

There are also checklists, articles and a blog (including comment on Ditko's one and only convention appearance - in 1964), making this the definitive Ditko site.

The Verdict: Just the thing for sad nostalgia buffs and I even get a mention (sort of). (DM)

Goody

www.goodygo.com

THE official website of SMUDGE, an off-shoot of a New York-based public access TV show that now aims to market clothes and films.

There is a section devoted to their first T-shirts (as modelled by Julia Stiles), but the main priority is **Goody**, a comic series by Mike Turney. Goody herself is a teenager living in Las Vegas, and her main companion is her black chihuahua.

There is a page of character bios that helps before progressing to the main comic. The site hits a snag here because, although the characters are engaging and the art is of a nicely polished, smooth cartoon style, the pages are only one panel each and there aren't many. In time, they could accumulate into a longer read, but there are only around eight panels available at a time.

However, there is a really nice animated sequence that loads fast and lasts about a minute. The animation is smooth and effective, despite its restrictions, and it's actually a pretty cool thing worth checking out on its own merits.

The Verdict: Interesting and very promising, but the lack of actual comic strip content is a hindrance to any online comic. (NL)

Hellboy

www.hellboy.com/

EVERYTHING you could ever want or need to know about Mike Mignola's paranormal investigator Hellboy is available at this officially-endorsed site.

Although it's currently going through a slight restructure/update, you can still access links for news, merchandise, interviews, comics and books, a

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NET VERDICT

message forum and a shopping page. The layout is easy to navigate and quick to load, and there are frequent updates, despite the infrequency of Hellboy itself.

The Verdict: A simple but comprehensive stop for any Mignola or Hellboy fan. (NL)

John Buscema

www.total.net/~iggyover/

There's surely no better time than now to remind ourselves of this comics' giant. Good news on Buscema's current health greets the intro. The rest is solid official creator site stuff, including the current vogue for commissioning your very own original artwork from a legend. Samples (which are a wee bit small on screen) show big JB still has it. Trawl the Galleries for proof.

The Verdict: Nothing new, which is as it should be. (DM)

John Cassaday

www.johncassaday.com/home.htm

THE stylish homepage provides links to sections devoted to news about the **Planetary** artist. There's a biography, original art and a gallery split into four to reflect Cassady's major projects: **Planetary**, **Desperadoes**, **Union Jack** and **X-Men/ Alpha Flight**.

Despite being a comparatively new artist, Cassaday has acquired a legion of fans due to the high quality of his work, and this site is a fine repository for these. Some unpublished or rare work would help make the site stand out a bit better though.

The Verdict: Comprehensive and with a nice graphic design, this is a fine but unsurprising site (NL)

Keenspot

www.keenspot.com

KEENSPOT claims to be the biggest publisher of exclusive web comics around, generating over a million page views a day - and who am I to argue, even if I don't know what they mean by 'page views'?

There are 44 daily web comics here covering humour, mystery and Manga, of varied quality, but no lack of diversity. Articles abound on the creators, and their creations, plus there are a couple of animations including *Parkemon*, a bizarre hybrid of *South Park* and *Pokemon*. Oh, and at least one comic will let you view in Hungarian.

How much more essential can you get?

The Verdict: Lotsa content, loadsa links. Enter here and your family might not see you again before next spring. (DM)

Marvel Comics

www.marvel.com

BILL Rosemann (Marvel's marketing communications manager) seems an awfully nice bloke. So when he announced via Superhero News that the official Marvel site had been significantly upgraded I was agog with anticipation. Sadly, there's not really much new, nor has there been any significant redesign. In fact it will look much the same as before to the occasional visitor.

Oh yes, the online comics are nice, as is the **Weapon X** preview, but there's still room for a lot more here. The character bios in Spider-Man, for instance, miss out J. Jonah Jameson and Aunt May. At least the boredom of 'loading' is alleviated by some nice trivia games.

The Verdict: Okay but room for improvement in content and design. Over to you, Joe. (DM)

P. Craig Russell

http://lurid.com/par/index.html

THIS section is the official site of artist P. Craig Russell, one of a group of sites linked together at lurid.com that are devoted to a circle of artists.

The pages load quickly and feature a range of subjects: previews of forthcoming projects, a treasury of past projects, art auctions, a message forum and a career retrospective that features thumbnailed artwork and interesting anecdotes from PCR himself about each one.

It is these little tidbits and Russell's high quality of artwork that elevate this above other similar sites.

The Verdict: An informative and interesting site with a nice collection of splash images. (NL)

Planetary: Archaeologists of the Impossible

http://homeearthlink.net/~rkkmar/frames/pageMain.htm

AN excellent site devoted to Warren Ellis's superb examination of superhero history and popular culture.

The site has a pleasingly minimalist design, but avoids pretentiousness. However, the site is very sensible in tone, perhaps a little too sensible, and could do with more fun features.

The news section is regularly updated and very thorough. The core of the site is a section containing very good synopses of individual issues, with insightful commentary, well-chosen pictures, and useful annotations to help the reader make the necessary links between the clues that Ellis is leaving throughout the series. Backing this up are a number of essays, which are very interesting, but hint that the website creators are perhaps taking the whole thing a little too seriously.

The Verdict: In terms of style and content, it would be hard to find a better Planetary site, but this really could do with being more fun! (KG)

Syntaxerror

www.syntaxerror.org.uk

THE homepage of **Borderline**'s columnist Mitzy, this well-designed site offers the usual homepage features, such as a guest book, photos and biographies. So why mention it here, in a review of comics-related websites? Because Mitzy has created a number of amusing little online comic strips, which should bring a smile to the face of even the most jaded comics reader (or **Sandman** fan!).

Danjuh Goil and **Big Fat Marker Riot** are two (intentionally) scrappily drawn, and quite filthy strips, full of Mitzy's anarchic sense of humour. The highlight, however, is **Flygirl**, an ongoing strip which is nominally about superheroes, but manages to poke fun at a variety of subjects (a pastiche of *Digimon* is one highlight). It reads like a wonderfully insane version of *The Powerpuff Girls*, and is just as entertaining. The writing is as humorous as ever, only this time with a plot (and less filth!). Mitzy shows off his art with this strip, revealing a strikingly attractive Manga-esque style.

The Verdict: The strips on this site offer a fun way to while away a few minutes, but beware of the adult tone of some of them! (KG)

Transformers Archive

www.tfarchive.com

ANY Transformers fan, if they do not already frequent this site, should bookmark it now! This is not the most exciting looking site on the Internet, since it is little more than a list of files. However, it is those files that make this so worthy of recommendation.

A huge amount of material is collected here, from sound files and animations to a very extensive picture gallery. However, the draw for most comics fans is a section containing complete scans of every single issue of the US **Transformers** comic, including the spin-offs. Now if only someone would do the same for the superior UK version..

The Verdict: Jam packed with useful resources, but well worth a visit for the comics scans alone! (KG)

BL

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COMICS ALMANAC

Adrian Brown picks the best of the rest from Previews

AIT/PLANET LAR

Sky Ape: Waiting For Crime
Amara, McCarney, Russo, & Jenkins
Surprisingly, the first volume of **Sky Ape** was a surreal and entertaining tale about a superhero ape. 56pg $6.95

ALTERNATIVE COMICS

Don't Trust Whitey (comic and music CD)
James Kochalka
His comics /music crossover has worked before, notably on ***Monkey versus Robot***, which was a song before the graphic novel was released. CD with comic $14.95

ANTARCTIC PRESS

Cathedral Child tpb.
112pg, b&w $10.95
Clockwork Angels tpb.
112pg, b&w $10.95
(New printings)
Lea Hernandez
Set in a magical manga-esque steampunk version of Victorian era Texas, these two adventure romances feature some very strong storytelling. They are especially notable given the dearth of titles for girls, although not limited in their appeal.

COM.X

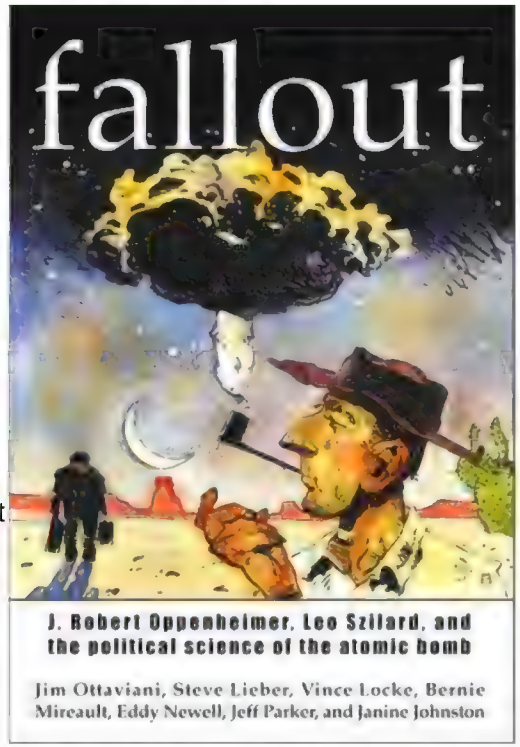
Class War #1
Rob Williams & Trevor Hairsine
The setting is a familiar one of corrupt government and controlling business. In some ways a traditional superhero comic, but the "villains" are more based in a reality of anti-capitalist activism. Dynamic art and the fine production values associated with Com.X.
32pg (1 of 6) $2.99

FUNK-O-TRON

Double Take #6
Casey, Adlard, Fraction, & Kuhn
Codeflesh moves over from Image; and hey, look, there's another simian superhero - Rex Mantooth! Apes must be the next big thing. 32pg $2.95

LIGHTSPEED PRESS

Finder #24
Carla Speed McNeil
Although this series is well under way, the first three trade paperbacks are available now; and it's a highly recommended futuristic fantasy tale. **Finder** has some very wry observations on our contemporary society with the current arc (*Dream Sequence*) focussing on a version of the internet. b&w, 24pg $2.95


fallout
J. Robert Oppenheimer, Leo Szilard, and the political science of the atomic bomb
Jim Ottaviani, Steve Lieber, Vince Locke, Bernie Mireault, Eddy Newell, Jeff Parker, and Janine Johnston

NBM

Birthday Riots (hardcover)
Nabiel Kanan
A political drama set in London, as a mayoral election heads for chaos. On the strength of Kanan's **Exit** & **Lost Girl** this'll be a well-told tale. 64pg, b&w $14.95

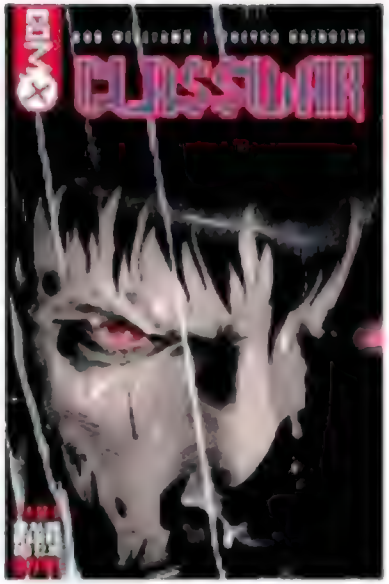
TOP SHELF PRODUCTIONS

Cicada Graphic novel
Josue Menjivar
The cicada as an allegory for the guilt of infidelity. Crisp, direct comic art in a moving story of relationships. 112pg, b&w $12.95

Lucky Luke creator Morris died in July this year. Some of the albums featuring his famous cowboy's meetings with Western heroes are offered for sale at lower prices. 48pg, FC $8.99

GT LABS

Fallout by Jim Ottaviani.
The story of Oppenheimer and Szilard, troubled architects of the A-bomb. The author previously brought together diverse artists to tell about various scientific pioneers in **Two-Fisted Science** (new edition listed alongside **Fallout**) and **Dignifying Science**, both educational and entertaining anthologies.
For this project, Ottaviani is joined by Steve Lieber, Vince Locke, Bernie Mireault, Eddy Newell & co.
Cover by Jeffrey Jones. 240pg, b&w $19.95



Marvel has a couple of cross-over creators lined up this month. Ted McKeever brings his take on Man-Thing to **Marvel Knights: Double Shot**, and John Totleben joins Bendis on the same character in **Marvel Team Up**.
The Batman titles have been revamped by Greg Rucka and Ed Brubaker, and now the latter turns his attention to **Catwoman**. The art looks closer to the very successful **Batman Adventures**, and the storytelling is simplified too. Art by Darwyn Cooke with Mike Allred.

The titles featured are those which may slip through the comics net. Unlike the mainstream titles, under-ordered indy titles may vanish without trace. Their publishers often have less scope to gamble their funds. If you want to support a worthwhile US or UK book in the current market, ordering via Previews is a must. Let your retailers know what you want to buy. For more comment, read Warren Ellis' www.orderingcomics.com

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REGION ONE

Matt Sommer looks at comics links in different media

WELCOME back to Region One, our monthly look at all things media related. This month, we continue my coverage of the new US TV season, covering a handful of returning favourites and promising newcomers from the rest of the major networks. September is the traditional kick-off for the season and series premieres in the States, and after surviving the dreaded summer re-run period I couldn't be happier!

FOX

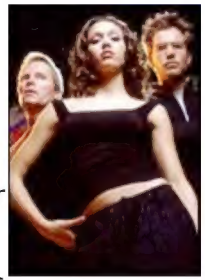
While spoilers are scarce for season 9 of **THE X-FILES**, one thing *is* clear - it may be the beginning of the end. Chris Carter has only signed a one season extension to his contract, while Gillian Anderson told London papers earlier this summer of her desire to leave the show after this year to spend more time with her daughter and to star in an unspecified West End stage production in 2002. Looks like Fox Mulder will be a deadbeat dad next season as David Duchovny made it clear that he is "done with the TV show" and will not appear in season 9 in any capacity, despite a season 8 plotline which seemed to implicate Mulder as the father of Scully's baby. Both Robert Patrick and Annabeth Gish *will* be back for season 9, however, reprising their roles as Agents John Doggett and Monica Reyes. In addition, ex-*Xena* star Lucy Lawless has been signed to make several appearances this season, and *Princess Bride* star Cary Elwes will also join the cast as Assistant Director Brad Follmer, a "buttoned-up" foil for Doggett & Scully who also happens to be Reyes' ex-boyfriend. As for the direction the series will take, look for Scully's baby to play a major role, while one insider hinted at some "*Sixth Sense*-ian" overtones. I personally thought last season was a breath of fresh air for the tired series, so I am looking forward to season 9 with great interest.

Premiers Sunday, Nov. 4th at 9p/8p central.

Both **FUTURAMA** and **THE SIMPSONS** will be back again for new seasons this fall. In the year 3000, look for Fry to be captured by mutants, Bender to romance a spaceship and Leela to try finding her parents. Over in Springfield, upcoming episodes include Homer being addicted to medicinal marijuana, a Judge ordering Homer and Bart to be shackled together, and a Halloween episode that parodies 2001 and the Harry Potter mania. Upcoming celeb voices include Julia Louis-Dreyfus, Richard Gere, Pierce Brosnan, Dennis Weaver, Jon Lovitz, REM, Ben Stiller and Reese Witherspoon.

FUTURAMA premiers Sunday, December 9th at 7p/6p central
THE SIMPSONS premiers Sunday, November 4th at 8p/7p central

James Cameron's **DARK ANGEL** is back again this fall for another season, which will find super-fugitive Max (recent Teen Choice Award winner Jessica Alba) continuing her fight against the evil agency that spawned her. Look for two new faces this year on the Manticore side - Jensen Ackles plays Alec, a loyal "transgenic" soldier from the same generation as Max, and Kevin Durand will play Joshua, a genetic experiment gone awry. The one foe Max may not be able to beat this year is a new timeslot - Fox has moved the show to Fridays, a traditional ratings dead-zone that has killed more sci-fi shows that I can remember.



The new season will premier Friday, Sept. 21, at 8p/7p central.

Meant as a mid-season replacement last year and then held over because of the looming writers strike, the live-action version of **THE TICK** will finally see the light of day this fall. Created by Ben Edlund and directed by Barry (*Men in Black*) Sonnenfeld, the series stars David "Puddy" Wharburton as everyone's favourite spoon-spouting arachnid. Buzz on the show has been extremely mixed, with some critics calling it fresh and hilarious while others see it as the season's first casualty. Be that as it may, word is that only 9 episodes have been filmed, so even if the show is a success it seems unlikely that Fox will be able to restart production any time soon. Miss it now and you'll most likely have to end up buying it from a bootlegger on next year's convention circuit. Premiers Thursday Nov. 1st, 8:30p/7:30p central.

One show that's gotten glowing reviews so far is the concept drama **24**, starring brat-packer Kiefer Sutherland as a CIA operative who must stop a presidential assassination attempt and rescue his daughter at the same time. The gimmick? Each of the season's 24 episodes will represent one hour of real time from a single day. Fox has already announced that the series will be shown on its FX cable channel, so fans needn't worry about it being cancelled around the 3am mark...

Premiers Tuesday, Oct. 30th at 9p/8p central.

ABC

Jumping on the "ass-kicking female heroine" bandwagon, **ALIAS** gives us Sydney Bristow (played by actress Jennifer Garner) - a perky grad-student by day and

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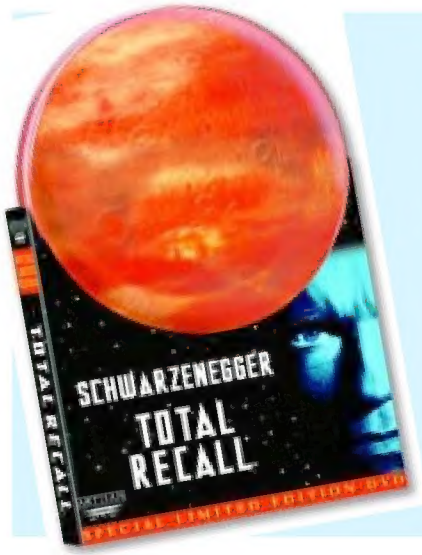
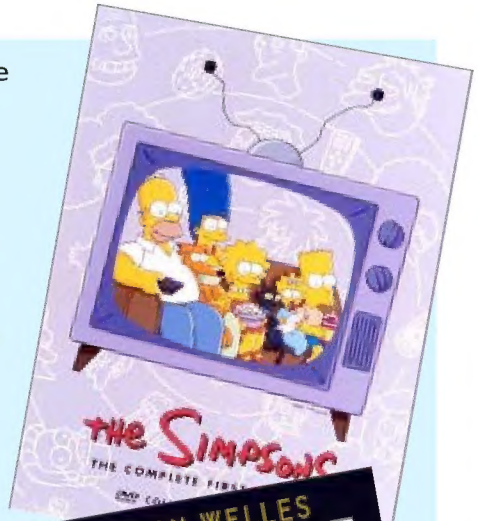


NEW US DVD RELEASES FOR SEPT.

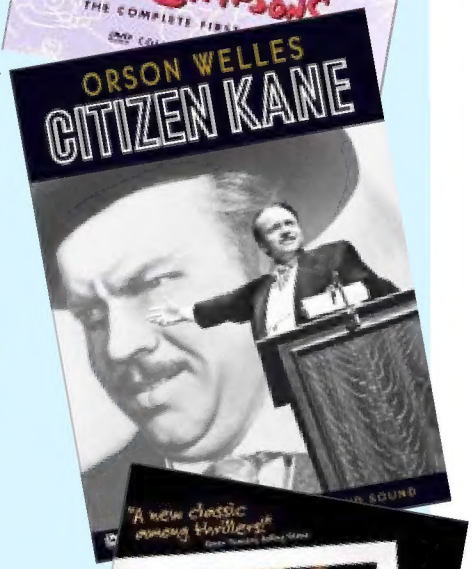
Total Recall (Collector's Edition Packaging)
Love it or hate it, one of Arnold's "other" blockbuster films gets the special edition treatment: included here is audio commentary by Schwarzenegger and director Paul Verhoeven, production notes, a documentary, a featurette and more (including that oddly shaped case...). In stores September 18th, with a suggested retail price of $26.98.

Citizen Kane
One of the greatest movies of all time finally arrives on DVD in this 2 disc set. Included are 2 different commentary tracks (one with film expert Roger Ebert), trailers, newsreels, documentaries, interviews, rare footage and more. This is what all DVDs should aspire to! In stores on September 25th, with a suggested retail price of $29.99.

The Simpsons - The Complete First Season
A definite must have for any true Simpsons fan, this boxed set includes all 13 eps from the show's first season as well as a drool-worthy collection of extras (selected scripts, audio commentary, the first Tracey Ullman Show short, a BBC special on the Simpsons, sketches, out-takes and much more). The set hits store shelves on September 25th with a suggested retail price of $39.98.



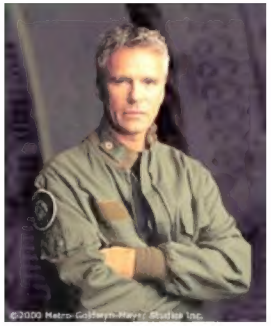
Memento
One of the best movies of this past year finally gets the DVD treatment, but unfortunately it's rather light on extra features: no director's commentary, no script, no deleted scenes, no copy of the original short story. What you do get is an interview with the director that originally aired on the IFC cable channel. In stores September 4th, with a suggested retail price of $24.95.



The Princess Bride (Special Edition)
One of the most oft-quoted movies from the 1980s finally gets the deluxe treatment, with 2 audio commentary tracks, a brand new documentary, behind the s`cenes footage, 2 new featurettes and a new anamorphic widescreen transfer. In stores September 4th with a suggested retail price of $29.99.

special operative for a secret division of the CIA by night. Described as a cross between *Run Lola Run* and *La Femme Nikita*, the show pulls no punches in the violence department. Created by J.J. Abrams (best known for his drama/soap *Felicity*), the show promises to blend action and melodrama in equal doses. The show airs opposite *The X-Files*, however, which could split the audience between the two. Premiers Sunday, Sept. 30th at 9p/8p central in a 2 hour, commercial free showing.

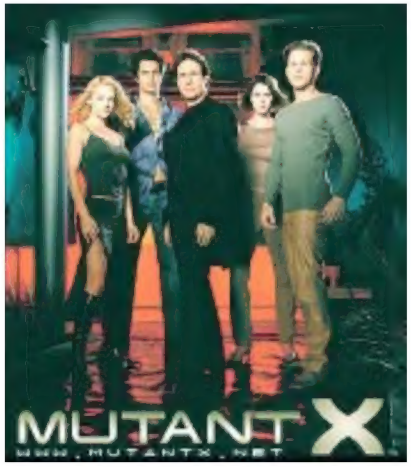
SYNDICATED



The SCI-FI CHANNEL has commissioned 22 new episodes of **STARGATE SG-1**, "rescuing" it from cancellation

after SHOWTIME refused to renew the MGM TV created show. The show will continue to air in syndication 6 months after the new episodes appear on the Sci-Fi Channel.

Marvel's new syndicated show **MUTANT X** has survived a legal challenge from FOX, who alleged that the new show infringed upon their ownership of the ***X-Men*** media rights. Indeed, the new show has little to do with the current X-Men mythos and nothing to do with the recently cancelled comic of the same name.



The TV **MUTANT X** follows a band of renegade "New Mutants" as they attempt to rescue other genetically mutated individuals from the clutches of the government that created and then sought to eliminate them. A cross between *Dark Angel* and *The Misfits of Science*, **MUTANT X** debuts October 1st. Check local listings for availability and check out www.mutantx.net for more character and behind the scenes information. BL

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WORLD OF HEROS

Chris Spicer & Rebecca Bonser's round-up of comics news that hasn't happened

Chris Claremont runs out of words

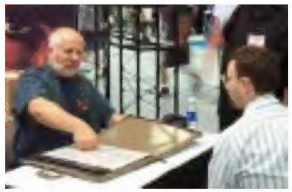
IN shock news, it has been revealed that Chris Claremont has run out of words! The writer, famed for his meandering dialogue and over-use of captions, has used up the amount of words allotted to him, and now cannot write or say a thing.

"I always said this would happen," said long time colleague Alan Moore. "I told him he didn't need all those captions and all that dialogue, but he ignored me. I warned him that if he continued to waste words then eventually there'd be none left. Looks like I was right all along."

We asked Claremont to comment, but all he could do was shake his head, gesticulate wildly and open and close his mouth like a gulping fish.

J Scott Campbell told us: "See? I'm not lazy – my lateness has been a medical safety measure! You wouldn't want me to not be able to write or talk, would you?" In a related story, the World of Heros team was recently admitted to hospital in order to have their sides stitched back up.

A final word from Moore? "Latitudinarianism."



Chris Claremont in therapy with Dr Miles Turgid – note how much improvement the writer has made, pointing at words for the doctor.

THE TOP STORY

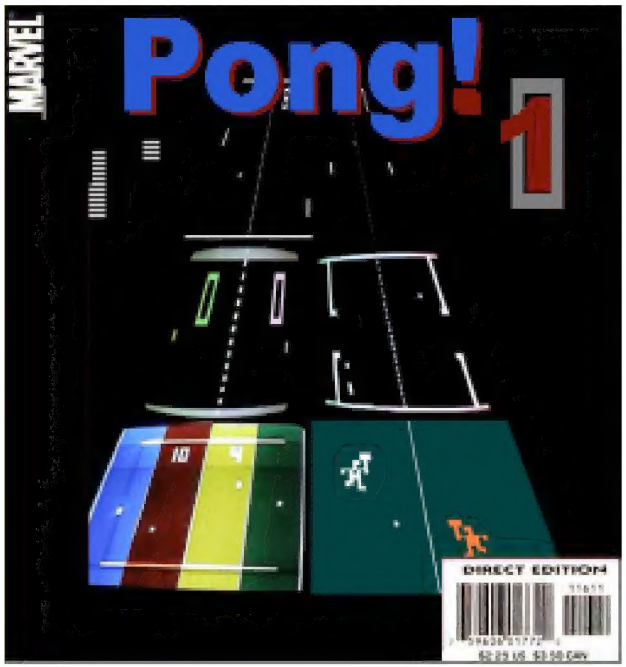
Marvel Attempts To Rejuvenate Market By Relying on Big Name Licences

MARVEL Comics today announced even newer **plans** to rejuvenate the ailing comics market. Following Image's successful licensing of the popular *Tomb Raider* game, Marvel is following suit with a new line of titles based on computer games.

We spoke to Marvel's Head of Superfluous Hypemongering, Bill Jemas, who gave us some details. "We're really excited about these licenses!" Jemas enthused. "They'll allow our **staff** to produce cutting edge comics that kids will really identify with!"

"They called him a Chicken - and now his shell is cracked!" That's the tagline for the first licensed title, Chucky Egg #1, which will be scripted by Brian Michael Bendis. "It's a tale of alienation," said Jemas. "Chucky was just a chicken who took his brood to the park one day. Unfortunately, they stumbled upon a clutch of mob **executions**, so the mobsters turned on Chucky and gunned him down, leaving him for dead! Now he is a chicken on the edge, searching **for** his missing eggs. It's a bleak tale of urban crime and bitter violent revenge. With poultry!"

In coming weeks, Chucky Egg will be joined by Pong #1 ("a tale of a **vicious** futuristic sport where the only rule is that there are no rules!"), Centipede #1 ("it's the garden from Hell - is there pesticide enough?") and the exciting Horrace Goes Skiing #1 ("love, betrayal and revenge amongst the slopes and the chalets, where people are cool, the action's hot, and you're guaranteed to get piste off!"). However, the most eagerly anticipated comic is Pick Up The Phone Booth And Die #1, based on the seminal text adventure of the same name. Said **Jemas** of the title: "Do you dare pick up the phone booth? Then you'll die..."



Pong will be written by Brian Michael Bendis, with an artist yet to be announced. Centipede will also be written by Brian Michael Bendis. Writer on the series Horrace Goes Skiing will be Brian Michael Bendis, while Brian Michael Bendis will be scripting Pick Up The Phone Booth And Die. Artists have yet to be announced.

We spoke to Bendis about the upcoming titles. He said: "Kill me. Kill me now."

We asked Avi Arad, Marvel's Head of Public Relations, for his opinion. He told us that he wished we were dead.

*Chris Tarrant & Regis Philbin – the possible stars of DC's **Who wants to be a Millionaire?***

ALSO IN THE NEWS

DC follows Marvel's Licensing Path

SOON after Marvel's announcement, DC announced that it has picked up the rights to produce comics based on two major television series. The first will be based on reality TV show *Big Brother*, and will be pitched as an *Elseworlds* title.

"We know what happens when you take ten regular people and lock them in a house together – we've seen that in the *Big Brother* television series," series scripter Denny O'Neil told us. "We'll be exploring what happens when an accident on set creates a time-warp... sending the contestants back to the Cretaceous period! How will this affect the day-to-day dramas in the Big Brother household? What will the contestants do? What will happen to them?" When pressed for details, he admitted that they'll "probably get eaten by dinosaurs."

DC's other big licence is Who Wants To Be A Millionare #1, to be scripted by Geoff Johns. "This comic is going to be huge!" Johns told us. "Why? It's *Who Wants To Be A Millionare!* It's bound to be popular!" Johns said that he would be attempting to capture the drama and tension of the show. When we asked him how, he said: "By having lots and lots of completely identical panels where nothing happens."

Dark Horse chose the same day to announce their new licensed title, but no-one was listening. **BL**

WORLD OF HEROS
The Best Source Of Comics News Which Hasn't Happened

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HOLD THE BACK PAGE

YOUR COMMENTS AND LETTERS

Bill Rosemann,
Marvel Comics, New York, USA
This is fucking cool!
The next step in comic book journalism! (and you can print that as a letter!)

Peet Clack,
email – peet.clack@ntlworld.com
I've only had a chance to skim through it so far, but what I've seen looks darned spiffy!
All I can say at this point is that it's nice to see a publication about comics that seems positive & upbeat-that's what we need if we're to get the industry back on its feet (and I hope it does, 'cos I'd like some work!)

Simon Fraser,
email – simonfraser@habari.co.tz
Wow, I am impressed, that's a very fine publication you have there, well done. It's eclectic, intelligent and most importantly enthusiastic, something that has been sorely lacking in comics related publications recently.
Shame about the interview with that jumped-up little scribbler, Irving, but otherwise a very enjoyable read... and it's FREE! Woohoo!

Shane D. Rivett
Newcastle, England
First off, congratulations on an excellent example of a modern magazine, some people pay £3 for stuff like this and there it is all free!
I read it from cover to cover and every page impressed me, not just the writing but also the enthusiasm that has been lacking in various other publications.
One thing I would like to pick up on, congratulations on highlighting some of the world's small press. You can read about Marvel and DC anywhere, sure you can give it that **Borderline** 'twist' but nothing really new can be said, and you can only read about **Powers** and **Ultimate Spider-Man** enough times before you get sick of them!
I had hoped **Borderline** would shine the light on small press just as much as the 'big names' and with a large article on Petra Electra, I was not disappointed. While starting my own small press comic, I really got in to what is out there and I hope I will be able to rely on **Borderline** to give it the attention it deserves.
This is incredible work, I wish you all the very best in the future.

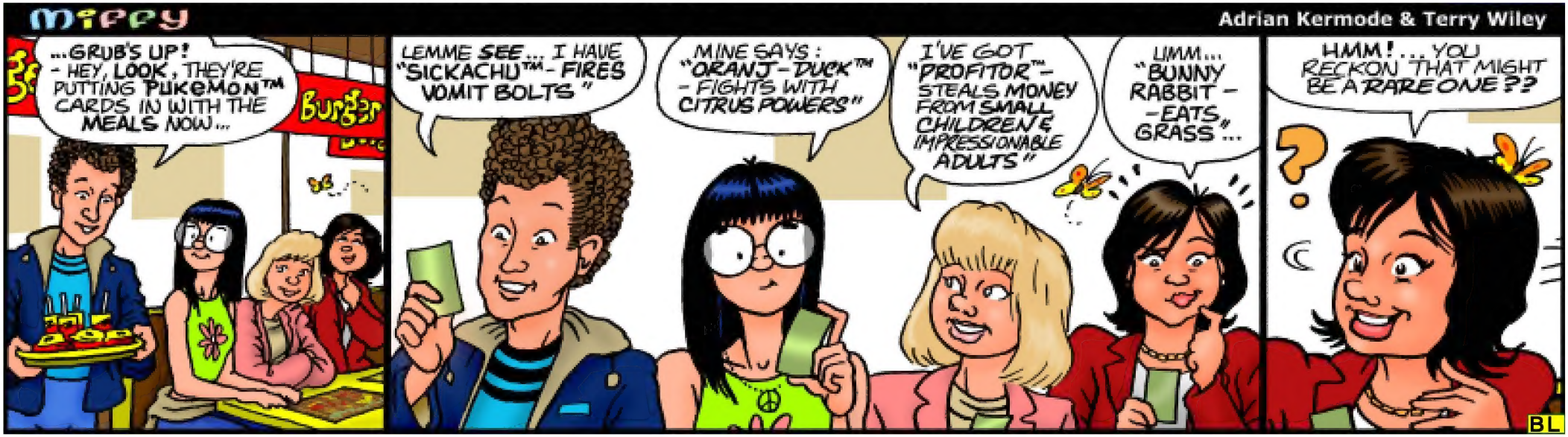
Lew Stringer
Birmingham, England
Just a quick line to compliment you and the team on a fine production! I dowloaded **Borderline** 1 yesterday, and haven't had chance to read it all yet, but I was very impressed with its design and variety of content. This is exactly what we need to keep fandom and the world at large informed about the possibilities comics offer.
It really is excellent stuff! Seeing the first issue take shape in Adobe Acrobat gave me the same buzz I experienced in 1976 when I saw my first comics fanzine in a London comic shop! (Except this time I wasn't surrounded by fanboys in week-old T-shirts and the room wasn't "lit" by a 20-watt bulb).
Long may it prosper! (Er, how *does* a free webzine prosper exactly?)

Jerry Ordway, USA
I finally read **Borderline** off Adobe Acrobat, and thought it was terrific. I was really impressed that you folks formatted it so well, as it was a snap to go from page to page. I also liked the mix of stories, from mainstream to stuff I hadn't heard about, but am now intrigued to check out.
All in all, a really fine effort. I hope it does well for you. I really did like what you did!

We also heard from:
Craig Conlan said, "Just been reading the new **Borderline**, which is ace."
Mark Weidenbaum from Comix@ said, "Man, this is incredible. Thanks. I'm going to read it cover to cover."
Andy Konky Kru said, "**Borderline** looks very good, professional, diverse, committed. Drawback is that one can't read it on-screen very well. But paper is best anyway, and one can choose the pages one is most interested in."
Matt J. Adams said, "Glad to see **Gemma Bovery** getting the publicity it deserves – I picked this up a couple of years back after catching a few instalments in **The Guardian** and couldn't put it down. Funny how it's not considered a comic by either the publishers or critics though, isn't it?"
Chris Staros of Top Shelf, said, "What a great issue!"
Astronauts in Trouble's **Larry Young** said, "An extremely impressive amount of work, and nicely presented. This is going to take a while to consume."
Dave Gibbons said, "This is a very impressive production; plenty to read and look at and perfectly formatted to the screen. I actually had it forwarded by Axel Alonso from Marvel, so it's getting seen already!"
Sasha Tau of **Comicgate.de** said "That's truly something which is worth the title MAGAZINE! It's great to have something like that on the web. I like the fact that you guys will try to cover comic news worldwide. That's unusual for an English mag."
Mike Collins (again) said, "**Borderline** #1 is very good... hey, it even has a pre-publishing endorsement from me on the back page!
Lovely layout – very eye-pleasing... on all sorts of design fronts it's a really fine package. The content is nothing to worry about either: some fine articles and comic strips in there! Now if you could get this kind of quality every issue, you folks have a hit!"

I said: *And that wasn't just it! But, hey, I need some room to say something! Over 16,000 people downloaded* ***Borderline*** *#1 in the first three weeks of publication – we had so many letters and comments it made the team and I feel justified and proud that all the work that went into it was being appreciated. And almost 100% in favour!*
We've got a lot of plans over the next few months, so tell your friends, colleagues and compadres about us – there's something for everyone in ***Borderline****!* *Phil Hall*

Letters to the editor should be sent to: Borderline Letters, 45 Fullingdale Road, The Headlands, Northampton, England NN3 2PZ or emailed to phil.hall@mediahall.co.uk


Mippy
Adrian Kermode & Terry Wiley
...GRUB'S UP! - HEY, LOOK, THEY'RE PUTTING PUKEMON™ CARDS IN WITH THE MEALS NOW...
Burger
LEMME SEE... I HAVE "SICKACHU™ - FIRES VOMIT BOLTS"
MINE SAYS: "ORANJ-DUCK™ - FIGHTS WITH CITRUS POWERS"
I'VE GOT "PROFITOR™ - STEALS MONEY FROM SMALL CHILDREN & IMPRESSIONABLE ADULTS"
UMM... "BUNNY RABBIT - -EATS GRASS"...
HMM!... YOU RECKON THAT MIGHT BE A RARE ONE??
BL

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